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ABSTRACT

This action research project evaluated a program for improving student discipline and developing a positive classroom environment. The targeted populations consisted of prekindergarten, first-, and fifth-grade students in two middle class suburbs of Chicago (Illinois). Changes in behavior were documented through behavior checklists, parental contact logs, discipline referrals by teachers to the principal, and teachers' anecdotal records. Analysis of probable cause data revealed that inappropriate behavior was related to lack of discipline plans in the classroom, the changing family structure, overcrowded schools, inclusion of special needs students, and the influence of television and other media. A review of solution strategies yielded the selection of three major components of intervention. These components were a clear classroom discipline plan developed by teachers, instruction in problem solving and intrapersonal decision-making skills, and regular positive reinforcement strategies. As a result of the interventions, the students decreased both acts of insubordination and acts of physical aggression by as much as 76 percent. Off-task behavior was decreased by as much as 63 percent. The students decreased assignment incompletion by as much as 71 percent. Finally, the students became better problem-solvers as a result of the interventions. (Eighteen appendices present observation and classroom materials. Contains 19 references.) (Author/JPB)

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# IMPROVING ELEMENTARY STUDENT BEHAVIOR THROUGH THE USE OF POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT AND DISCIPLINE STRATEGIES

ED 413 044

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ..... iii

TABLE OF CONTENTS ..... iv

CHAPTER 1- PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT ..... 1

General Statement of Problem ..... 1

Immediate Problem Context ..... 1

The Surrounding Community ..... 4

National Context of the Problem ..... 8

CHAPTER 2- PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION ..... 10

Problem Evidence ..... 10

Probable Causes (site-based) ..... 16

Probable Causes (literature-based) ..... 21

CHAPTER 3- THE SOLUTION STRATEGY ..... 27

Literature Review ..... 27

Project Objectives ..... 37

Project Action Plan ..... 37

Methods of Assessments ..... 44

CHAPTER 4- PROJECT RESULTS ..... 46

Historical Description of the Intervention ..... 46

Presentation and Analysis of Results ..... 48

Conclusions and Recommendations ..... 57

REFERENCES ..... 67

APPENDICES

Appendix A.....69
Appendix B.....70
Appendix C.....71
Appendix D.....72
Appendix E.....73
Appendix F.....74
Appendix G.....75
Appendix H.....76
Appendix I.....77
Appendix J.....78
Appendix K.....79
Appendix L.....80
Appendix M.....81
Appendix N.....82
Appendix O.....83
Appendix P.....84
Appendix Q.....85
Appendix R.....86

## ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for improving student discipline and developing a positive classroom environment. The targeted populations consisted of prekindergarten, 1st- and 5th- grade students in two middle class suburbs of Chicago. Changes in behavior were documented through behavior checklists, parental contact logs, discipline referrals by teachers to the principal, and teachers' anecdotal records.

Analysis of probable cause data revealed that inappropriate behavior was related to lack of discipline plans in the classroom, the changing family structure, overcrowded schools, inclusion of special needs students and the influence of television and other media.

A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others, as well as an analysis of the problem setting, yielded the selection of three major components of intervention. These components were a clear classroom discipline plan developed by teachers, instruction in problem-solving and intrapersonal decision-making skills, and regular positive reinforcement strategies.

As a result of the interventions, the students decreased both acts of insubordination and acts of physical aggression by as much as 76%. Off-task behavior was decreased by as much as 63%. The students decreased assignment incompletion by as much as 71%. Finally, the students became better problem-solvers as a result of the interventions.

# CHAPTER 1

# PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

## General Statement of the Problem

Student misbehavior can negatively affect the classroom environment. The nature and significance of the problem can be established by looking at behaviors seen by most teachers. Disrespect, physical aggression, and defiance all contribute to the disruption of the learning environment. All can attest to the minutes taken away from teaching time to handle discipline behaviors. This problem is seen at all levels of the school environment, in all socioeconomic situations.

The context of our situation consists of a prekindergarten, a first grade, and a fifth grade classroom. Three different schools in two districts were involved in this research.

## Immediate Problem Context

### School A

The fifth grade classroom comes from school A. The total enrollment of the school is 497 students. Of these 95.8% are white, 0.8% are African American, 2.8% are Hispanic, and 0.6% are Asian-Pacific Islander. In school A, 19.7% of students come from home situations of low economic status (defined as receiving reduced or free lunches). There are 0% from Limited English Proficient homes. School A has a 96.0% attendance rate and 11.1% student mobility. The rate of chronic truancy in school A is 0% and the average class size in grade 5 is 26 students. (1995 School Report Card)

School A is a K-5 building staffed by 27 full time teachers, and two part time teachers. There are four kindergartens, four first, second, third and fourth grades and three fifth grades. There are three special area teachers in the fine arts (music, art and gym). There is also a full time resource teacher for special education. The building has an instructional aide who assists in the classroom with mini-lessons and a Chapter 1 reading teacher who is shared with another school.

School A has a discipline policy handbook that is distributed every year to each student. Parents must sign a handbook review document that shows that they have gone over the material with their child and return it to school.

School B

The first grade classroom comes from School B. The total enrollment of school B is 313 students. Of these students, 42.5% are White, 50.8% are African American, 3.2% are Hispanic, and 3.5% are Asian-Pacific Islander. In school B, 6.4% of students are low income (defined as those receiving reduced or free lunches), while 1.0% are Limited English Proficient. School B has an attendance rate of 94.9%, a student mobility rate of 14.7%, and a chronic truancy rate of 0.1% . The average class size in grade 1 of school B is 19.8 students. School B has had 100% parent involvement (parent participation through volunteer activities, parent-teacher conferences, etc.). (1995 School Report Card)

School B is a building for students in grades kindergarten through grade 2. There are three kindergartens, five first grades, and six second grades. The staff is comprised of 14 teachers with art, music and physical education teachers as well. There is one special education classroom in which students requiring special services are self-contained in the morning and included in the regular classrooms throughout the afternoon. These students are then taught by regular education teachers in their classrooms in the afternoon. There is also a resource program in school B in which

other students requiring services are either given extra help in the classroom or pulled out of the classroom for small group instruction by one of the two building aides. School B employs two speech pathologists, an occupational therapist, a psychologist and a social worker on a part time basis. School B also has a Reading Recovery program for some first grade students.

School B has a discipline policy and a set of rules that is applied to the three grades within. Each grade level, in turn, uses these to create a plan which includes consequences for breaking a rule. Even with the established rules and consequences, school B has still experienced many problems with student behavior. This is evident through the number of notices sent to parents about a student breaking a rule, through the number of referrals to the principal, and through the number of both in and out of school suspensions. These aspects of negative student behaviors can make a classroom a difficult environment in which to learn.

School C

The prekindergarten classroom is located in School C which is in the same district as School B. The total enrollment of school C is 85 students. Of these 45.0% are White, 33.0% are African American, 5.0% are Hispanic and 1.0% are Asian-Pacific Islander or other. In school C, 12.5% of students are of low income, (defined as those receiving reduced or free lunches), and there are 2.0% Limited English Proficient students. School C has an attendance rate of 91.2%, and a student mobility rate of 12.5%. (1995 School Report Card)

School C is a building for students in Early Childhood Special Education and Project Early Start, an at-risk prekindergarten program. The full time staff is comprised of four teachers and four aides. There is also a full time speech pathologist, two part-time occupational therapists and one part-time physical therapist. Music, library, gym are taught by regular staff members. Within school C, the four classrooms are broken

into two clusters for inclusion purposes. There is a full inclusion cluster (special education and an at-risk grouping) and a partial inclusionary cluster (special education and an at-risk grouping) in school C. School C defines its inclusion program as the combination of children from two classrooms in which those with special needs can be involved with regular education students. There are two classroom sessions held per day, five days a week, for children ages three through six.

School C upholds the district discipline policy and also develops its own discipline policies. Although there are some differences between the special education behavior guidelines and those for the at-risk classes, there are still some basic rules that are enforced. Each of those guidelines though, are given with the understanding that if a rule is broken there will be some sort of consequence that follows. Parents are notified of the discipline plan for their children at the beginning of the school year. Misbehaviors are handled differently at this age level because the understanding of right and wrong and of consequences may or may not hold meaning for students. However, negative behavior still affects the classroom environment.

## The Surrounding Community

The school surroundings are as important to the child's learning as the building and the teachers themselves. It is important to note that these schools are in two different areas and contain different geographical information.

School A is found in District 1 in the south suburbs of Chicago. It is a district with three buildings. Two of the buildings house kindergarten through grade 5 and the other building is the junior high, grades 6 through 8. District 1 is comprised of 94.9% White, 0.8% African American, 3.2% Hispanic, 0.9% Asian-Pacific Islander and 0.2% Native American. The total district enrollment is 1,141 students. Of these 24.2% are of low economic households, while 3.1% are Limited English Proficient students. The

district's attendance rate is 95.6% with a chronic truancy rate of 0.1%. The student mobility rate for the district is 15.7%.

District 1 has a total of 63 full time staff members and an average class size of 26 students. Of the 63 full time staff members 13.7% are male, 86.3% are female and 100% of the staff is White. The average teaching experience of the staff in District 1 is 14.1 years with 65.7% of the staff holding Bachelor's degrees and 34.3% having Master's degrees or above. In District 1 the pupil-teacher ratio is 20.4:1 and the average teachers' salary is $36,208.00.

Both schools B and C are in District 2. District 2 is an elementary district made up of six buildings, one is pre-primary, two are primary(K-2), two are intermediate(3-5), and one is the junior high(6-8). The total district enrollment in District 2 is 2,184 students of which 46.1% of those students are White, 48.4% are African American, 2.7% are Hispanic, 2.7% are Asian-Pacific Islander and 0.1% are Native American. The low income student rate is 10.0% and the Limited English Proficient students rate is 0.2%. The attendance rate is 95.1%, the student mobility rate is 13.0% and the chronic truancy rate for District 2 is 1.3%. The average class size for the district is 20.3 students except for those classes that are limited by other sources, ie. special education and at-risk preschool programs which are limited in size due to grant funding definitions.

The teacher and administrative information is based on full -time equivalents, and teachers include all school personnel whose primary responsibility is listed as that of classroom teacher. Given this, there are 140 teachers in District 2; 13.6% are male and 86.4% are female. The racial make up of the teachers is 78.6% White, 18.6% African American, 0.7% Hispanic, and 2.1% of staff are Asian-Pacific Islander. The average number of years of teaching experience in District 2 is 13.7 with 67.5% of teachers holding Bachelor's degrees and 32.5% holding Master's degrees or above.

In District 2, the pupil to teacher ratio is 19.3:1 and the average salary of teachers is $35,195.00.

There are some community services that are available to students and families in District 2. The Before and After School Program(BASE) is a daycare program run in two rooms, at School C, rented out by the district in which parents may enroll their children. Aunt Martha's is a local organization which aids in foster placement, day care, and other social services to those families in the south suburbs of Chicago. Lastly, there are other organizations that District 2 uses as a placement for incoming or outgoing students based on their educational needs. They are parent infant programs, Cooperative for special education, and placements for severe behavior disorders.

The community surrounding District 1 is an integrated one with a population of 16,500. District 1 encompasses an area of 1.4 square miles and is primarily a middle class community. There is a large number of apartment complexes in District 1 which leads to a higher mobility rate than that of District 2. District 1 is serviced by a large police force and two fire houses. It is a community transversed by both Metra Commuter Rail Service and the Indiana Harbor Belt Railroad. This makes the community attractive to those individuals who work in downtown Chicago. Well-maintained parks and recreation areas are available as is a park district program called RAH (Recreation After Hours) for those students who would normally be home alone after school. There are several churches in District 1 and there are currently no new developing housing projects as there is no space available.

District 1 has a general curriculum that involves all subjects for the entire school district. All content areas meet or exceed standards set by the school improvement plan. The district follows state guidelines and develops goals that allow staff to maintain a high quality of education. Expenditures in District 1 are $4,467.00 per student.

District 2 encompasses several communities that run a range of economic and social stature. It is a racially integrated community that views involvement in activities such as schools, park district programs, and community events as crucial to their well being as a community. The income range for this community also runs a wide range from households which are financially stable to those which are low income and receiving some type of financial assistance: Welfare, Aid to Dependent Children, Food Stamps.

District 2 is a community not without its problems though, as the incidence of gang violence has increased over the past five years. The large police forces and social service agencies are working with parents and the school system to develop alternatives to gang activities and to establish training and awareness seminars in an effort to keep the communities updated on current situations. There are several fire departments in the local area as well as many churches. There is a wide variety of building in the local area with subdivisions consisting of single family homes and towne homes. The communities are also crossed by the Commuter Rail Service that creates an ideal environment for those who work in downtown Chicago.

District 2 is also working on a vision plan, which consists of revising curricula and updating staff and classrooms with the latest technology. The district holds a general curriculum plan that involves all subjects for most students. Prekindergarten classes offer a curriculum that features lessons based on themes that focus on introductory math, science and other basic skills while a majority of the time is spent on developing language and social skills. All content areas meet or exceed standards as set by the school improvement plan. The district follows state guidelines and develops goals that allow staff to maintain a high quality of education. Expenditures in District 2 are $5,225.00 per student.

## National Context of the Problem

Inappropriate behavior is a major concern for those who teach. Educators are held accountable for developing skills of responsible behavior by creating a positive environment in which children can learn these skills. Negative behavior, as teachers see it, only serves to disrupt learning and hinder a productive classroom. Viewing discipline as separate from education has often led us toward repressive measures to reestablish order rather than to provide positive educational approaches to discipline that educators have found successful.(Wayson, DeVoss, Kaeser, Lasley, Pinnell; and the Phi Delta Kappa Commission on Discipline, 1982)

The general public as well as teachers everywhere have recognized the negative effects of inappropriate student behavior. The Gallop polls of the 1970s and 80s report that the public believes the answer to problems within the schools is improved discipline procedures. In the same polls teachers rated classroom management and discipline as their number one concern. (Burke, 1992) The public's attitude towards the schools have not changed much according to the 1995 Gallop poll. In this poll, lack of discipline in the schools was one of two major problems facing schools. (Elam, S.M., and Rose,L.C. 1995)

Inappropriate student behavior continues to be a pertinent concern in all schools. Teachers are sharing their frustrations over the growing number of students who are out of control. (Burke, 1992) This causes many teachers today to find it increasingly difficult to establish a classroom environment free from disruptive behavior. (Canter, 1992) Examples of these behaviors include talking at inappropriate times, off-task behavior when asked to work on an assignment, and students who show disrespect and defiance when asked to follow directions. Dreikur's study (as cited by Burke, 1992) shows that students who cannot get positive recognition often misbehave.

Many teachers have students in their classrooms who act out occasionally. While these disruptive behaviors are by no means desirable, Canter (1992) states that these are not the difficult students. He describes difficult students as those who are continually disruptive, persistently defiant, demanding of attention or unmotivated. There are many types of problems that difficult students present in the classroom. The following is a list of behavioral descriptions that these students may exhibit: (a) talk back, rude; (b) constantly off-task; (c) violent behavior with peers; (d) defiant attitude; (e) one misbehavior after another; (f) verbally abusive to teacher; (g) non-stop talking; (h) don't care. (Canter, 1992)

Many students who exhibit inappropriate behaviors are trying to make teachers notice them through a demonstration of negative behavior. (Burke, 1992) Canter states that students will 'act out' to get attention, power, revenge, or whatever makes them feel satisfied if they feel their needs aren't being met. (Burke, 1992)

The fact that students who exhibit inappropriate behavior in all schools is apparent. It has also been shown that teachers feel that the number of students exhibiting these behaviors are increasing. This problem demands the attention of educators because each disruptive student not only interrupts his or her own learning but can also stop the teacher from teaching and can stop the other students in the classroom from learning.

# CHAPTER 2

## PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

### Problem Evidence

School A

In order to document students' disruptive behavior in school A, two methods were used. First, discipline referrals to the office by teachers from the previous year were studied. Also, interviews with the previous year's teachers were conducted.

School A, each year, supplies each student with a copy of the student handbook which describes the discipline procedures to be followed by the students and staff in district 1. A sign off sheet is given with each book to document that the parents of district 1 students are familiar with the school discipline code. Therefore, there should be few questions asked by parents when a student has been referred to the office for disciplinary reasons. In school A, most discipline problems are to be handled by the classroom teacher. The classroom teachers are free to make up their own classroom rules which should go along with the district's discipline code. Teachers in school A send discipline referrals to the principal's office when a student's misbehavior has warranted a referral. The student is then disciplined by the principal and the district's discipline code is administered. The following graph illustrates the amount and type of referrals to the principals' office for the 4th-grade students during the 1995-1996 school year.

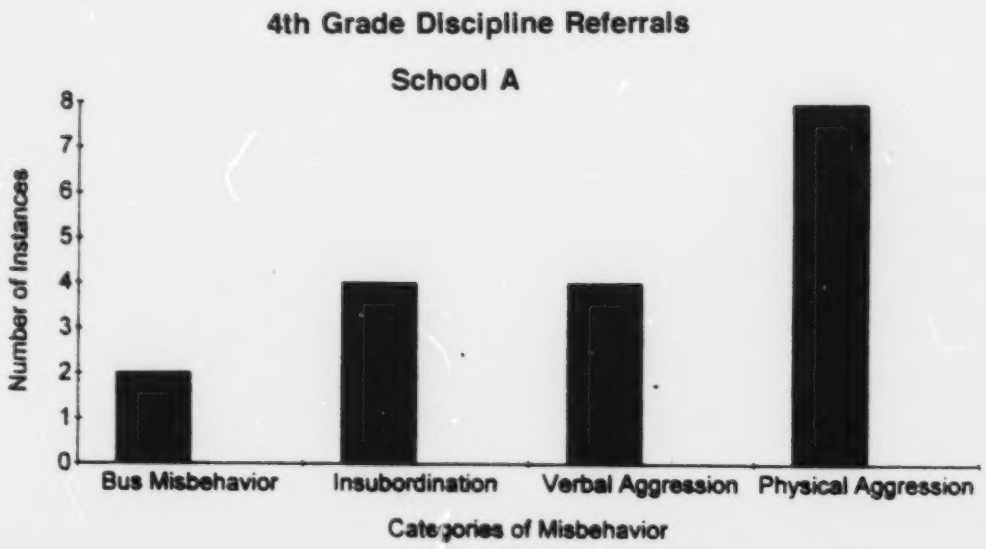


Figure 1.

Figure 1 illustrates that there were 18 referrals to the principal's office by 4th grade teachers. Of the 18 referrals to the principal's office, eight were incidents of students being physically aggressive to one another. These physical aggressions ranged from pushing and shoving during recess to fighting. Four of the referrals involved student insubordination towards the teachers. These incidents were examples of students being severely disrespectful towards their teachers. Another four referrals were incidents of students being verbally aggressive towards one another. These referrals were written for swearing, insults, and verbal fighting. Two referrals were written for bus misbehavior. These referrals were written by bus drivers for severe bus misbehavior.

School A had four 4th-grade classrooms during the 1995/1996 school year. The total population of the fourth grades was 80 students. Interviews were conducted with the four 4th-grade teachers at school A to determine the types and frequencies of misbehaviors during the 1995/1996 school year. The four teachers cited lack of consistent assignment completion as a major concern. Another concern in the 4th-

grade classrooms was bickering and verbal fighting among the students . This was mentioned by all teachers as a sizable problem. All teachers responded that off-task behavior among the 4th-grade students was also a problem that needed constant attention. Both inconsistent assignment completion and off-task behavior must be dealt with by the classroom teacher. These are not misbehaviors that can be referred to the office per school board policy. The final concern of the 4th-grade teachers were physical aggression and fighting among the 4th-grade students. It was not uncommon for students to be involved in a shoving match once a week. The 4th-grade teachers adopted a hands-off policy where any student caught pushing, kicking, hitting, or any way touching another student was given an automatic referral to the office. This policy was said to be highly effective.

School B

In order to document the general extent of inappropriate behavior at school B, district 2, anecdotal records consisting of referrals to the principal and records from 1st-grade teachers regarding the number of frequent and serious offenders were recorded. Interviews with teachers from the previous year were done. This data was based on inappropriate student behavior during the 1995/1996 school year since the intervention was implemented during the first week of the 1996/1997 school year.

School B provides all students with the rules and asks students and parents to review the rules together. Parents and students are then asked to sign the rule sheet to state their understanding of the rules. This gives all parents and students alike the opportunity of becoming familiar with the school's discipline policy.

The discipline policy of school B is that when a student exhibits inappropriate behavior, the classroom teacher handles the situation according to the classroom discipline plan. If a student repeats the behavior, the teacher contacts the parents. Then if a student continues, the student will be referred to the principal. A student may

also be referred directly to the principal for an extreme case such as possessing a weapon in school." A summary of the number and categories of referrals to the principal during the 1995/1996 school year is included in Figure 2. The targeted class at school B was a 1st-grade class.

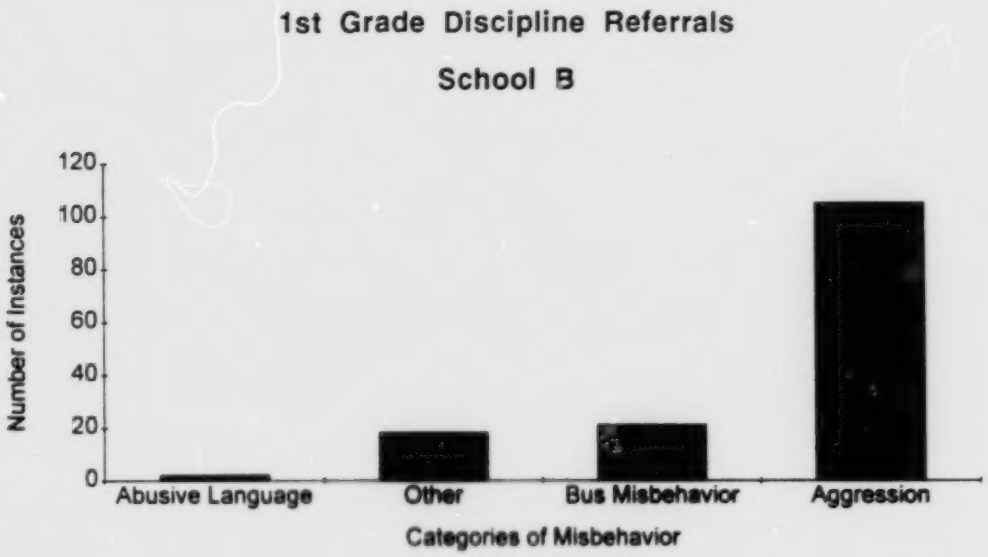


Figure 2.

Figure 2 illustrates that there were 146 referrals to the principal in 1995/1996 by Kindergarten teachers and bus drivers. Eighty-four percent of the referrals were related to aggression. These aggressive behaviors included pushing, shoving, and fighting either at recess or in the school building. Two students were referred for abusive language. Eighteen of the referrals were in the 'other' category. Examples of types of behavior in this category are sexual reactivity, urinating on the playground and self-induced vomiting.

Anecdotal records from the first-grade teachers revealed in the 1995/1996 school year 13 first grade students out of 109 exhibited frequent and serious misbehaviors. These behaviors included physical and verbal aggression toward both students and

faculty members. These students often had to be removed from the classroom either to keep them from physically harming another person or because they were a constant disruption to the learning environment.

Interviews were done with the 3 kindergarten teachers to gather information about types of misbehaviors seen among this year's first graders in the 1995/1996 school year. All three cited that a major concern was that the students would not keep their hands and feet to themselves. Specific examples of this behavior included poking, pushing, stepping on feet, and constant touching, punching, and hitting. Another concern of the teachers was inappropriate talking or yelling out. Not following directions and off-task behavior were strong concerns of all three kindergarten teachers as well. All three teachers agreed that the majority of discipline problems were handled by the classroom teacher with very few students who were repeatedly referred to the principal.

School C

Since the targeted class at school C was a prekindergarten class, no records from a previous year were available. Instead records of misbehaviors were examined from the previous years' prekindergarten class. In order to see the extent of the misbehaviors at the prekindergarten level during 1995/1996 at school C, district 2, two methods of accumulating information were used. Teacher anecdotal records of 2nd year prekindergarten students were gathered, and behavior concerns listed by parents on preschool screening surveys were reviewed.

School C provided parents with a list of school and district discipline policies in a school handbook at the beginning of the year. Parents were asked to review the information with their children and to acknowledge it by signing an acceptance sheet as well as a bus rule sheet. This allowed everyone the opportunity to know that there were rules and school codes that needed to be followed.

The discipline policy of school C states that when a student exhibits inappropriate behavior, the classroom teacher is responsible for handling the situation according to the rules set up under the classroom discipline plan. If the student continues to exhibit the behavior, often 2 to 3 verbal warnings are given; then if the behavior is still present the student receives a time out (a set time for the child to be separated from the group until he/she is able to rejoin the group). A parent will be notified about the behavior and often a telephone or face-to-face conference is necessary. In extreme cases (such as physically injuring a faculty member by biting them or cursing at them) the student is referred to the principal's office. A summary of the number of referrals to the principal as well as other categories is included in Figure 3.

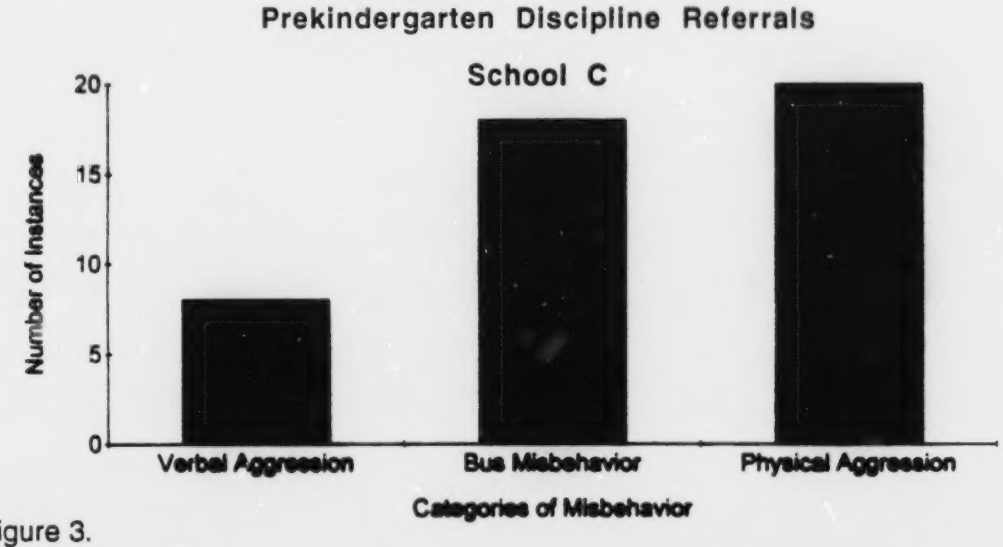


Figure 3.

Figure 3 illustrates that there were 46 referrals to the principal for the 1995/1996 school year by preschool teachers and bus drivers. Twenty-eight of the referrals were related to insubordination between student and the teacher. Of this twenty-eight, twenty of the referrals of insubordination also were related to physical aggression. Aggressive behaviors include pushing, kicking, shoving, pulling hair, spitting, and grabbing others' belongings.

In the 1995/1996 school year 5 prekindergarten students out of 85 were referred to the principal for severe inappropriate behaviors. These behaviors include physical aggression and verbal aggression toward staff and other students.

Teachers were asked about their students who were returning for a second prekindergarten year in order to gather information about the types of misbehaviors they had seen. They cited problems such as not following directions, becoming inattentive and distracted and being physically aggressive toward other students as their major concerns. All teachers reported that the discipline problems were handled within the classroom setting, and did not require a referral to the principal's office. Also, the number of bus incident reports remained a concern, and these reports were automatically submitted to the principal's office. Teachers also stated that the students who were returning for a second year tended to have a better grasp of the routines and discipline policies given by their new teachers.

Parental concerns that were listed on the preschool screening survey ranged from that of not following directions in the home to inattentiveness when doing everyday activities. On a recent screening, 11 out of 24 parents listed behavior as a concern with their children. Some were looking for ways to get appropriate help for their child who was out of control or they were looking for a placement that would enable their child to have good behavior role models. Underlying causes for their need to be screened were isolation, prematurity, low economic status, teenage parents, or behavior concerns.

## Probable Causes

### Site-Based

#### School A

All of the teachers at school A were given a survey to complete regarding discipline. (Appendix A, schools A, B, & C used the same form of survey). According to the data

gathered from the 19 surveys returned, 16 teachers stated that student behavior was a concern; this is approximately 84% of the teachers surveyed.

Teachers at school A were asked to list what they believed to be the causes of student misbehaviors. Table 1 represents the probable causes named by teachers surveyed at school A.

Table 1

Categories & Percentages of Teacher Opinion of Possible Causes of Misbehavior

School A

| Probable Causes | Number of Teachers | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Parental/ Family Support | 15 | 79% |
| Chaotic Home Life | 7 | 37% |
| Attention Seekers/ Peer Pressure | 6 | 32% |
| Learning Problems | 5 | 26% |
| Classroom Management | 3 | 16% |
| Student Immaturity | 2 | 11% |
| Television/Media | 2 | 11% |
| Poor Role Models | 1 | 5% |

The largest number of teachers responded that parental support was weak. Often, parents were hard to reach, unavailable, or did not support the discipline practices in the classroom . In district 1 there are a large number of single parent homes. It was not uncommon for a parent to come to school functions with a different "significant other" each time or come alone. An unstable home situation such as this may serve to make incidents of misbehavior more frequent. This is related to the categories of poor role models and television/media. Many children spend time without any supervision in their homes. This idle time leads to children watching many hours of television. Many students also did not have a male role-model which may have given them a slanted view of the world.

District 1 has a very transient population. This changing population regularly brought in large numbers of new students. These new students wanted the approval

of peers, so they tended to act out to gain attention and notoriety. Peers could also persuade other students to behave in ways they would not normally behave. These behaviors often led to referrals to the principal's office. Several teachers stated that they believed student misbehavior was caused by students with learning problems. If a student did not understand what was going on in the classroom, or was bored, that student was more likely to misbehave.

Lack of classroom management was also one of the possible causes of student misbehavior at school A. Teachers with ineffective discipline plans or no discipline plans had more instances of misbehavior. Two first-year teachers at school A had many discipline problems the previous year. They both attributed their problems to ineffective classroom management.

After looking at several different aspects of school A, there was evidence that discipline problems did occur and are a concern. Probable causes of student misbehavior have been hypothesized by the teachers at school A. These probable causes guided a search of the literature written by knowledgeable others, in order to obtain possible solutions to the problem of student misbehavior.

School B

All the teachers at school B, district 2 were given a survey to complete regarding discipline. (Appendix B, schools B & C used same inclusion survey). These surveys yielded a list of site-based causes of student misbehaviors. Of the 11 teachers who participated in the survey, 9% stated that inappropriate behavior was not a concern at all, 45% of teachers said that inappropriate behavior was somewhat of a concern, and 46% of teachers said that inappropriate behavior was very much of a concern in their classroom.

Another part of the survey asked teachers to express their opinions regarding the

causes of the student misbehavior. Many teachers gave detailed accounts of their feelings about this. Table 2 summarizes this information.

Table 2

Categories & Percentages of Teacher Opinion of Possible Causes of Misbehavior

School B

| Probable Causes | Number of Teachers | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Chaotic Home Life | 7 | 66% |
| Parental/ Family Support | 6 | 55% |
| Attention Seekers/Peer Pressure | 5 | 45% |
| Learning Problems | 3 | 27% |
| Lack of Social Skills | 3 | 27% |
| Poor Self-Esteem | 3 | 27% |
| Student Immaturity | 2 | 18% |
| Television/ Media | 2 | 18% |
| Poor Role Models | 1 | 9% |

The two causes mentioned by most teachers both dealt with parental involvement, parental/family support and chaotic home life. Specific causes mentioned by teachers were single-parent homes, parental absence from home because of long work days, and no limits or rules being set at home regarding behavior. Many teachers noted that behavior problems were often apparent with children whose parents did not support school by helping children with homework and attending parent-teacher conferences and other school functions.

Attention-getting behaviors were also cited often by teachers as a possible cause of student misbehavior. Many students are so desperate for attention from teachers and peers that they will strive to get it any way possible, even in negative ways.

Learning problems contribute to student misbehaviors according to some teachers. Students who are having difficulty understanding academic concepts are often frustrated and bored. These feelings can often lead to students acting out. Poor self-esteem can also cause some students to misbehave. The lack of social skills is also a

factor in student misbehavior. Many students have never been taught appropriate ways to interact with other children. A few teachers listed student immaturity, television and media, and poor role models as other causes of negative student behavior.

Reflecting upon the data, anecdotal records, teacher interviews, and teacher surveys from school B there was evidence that student misbehaviors can negatively affect the classroom environment. Probable causes of this behavior have been examined at school B which will help guide a search of literature for possible solutions.

School C

All teachers at school C, district 2, were given a survey to complete regarding discipline in September of 1996(Appendix C). Of the 5 teachers surveyed, 1 stated that inappropriate behavior was not a concern at all, 4 cited that inappropriate behavior was somewhat of a concern and none listed inappropriate behavior as a great concern.

A second part of the survey asked the teachers to give their opinions about the causes of student misbehaviors. The teachers gave a wide variety of answers summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

Categories & Percentages of Teacher Opinion of Possible Causes of Misbehavior

School C

| Probable Causes | Number of Teachers | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Parental/Family Support | 3 | 60% |
| Chaotic Home Life | 3 | 60% |
| Learning Problems (ie., ADHD, BD) | 3 | 60% |
| Classroom Management | 4 | 80% |
| Abuse (ie.,physical, sexual, verbal) | 3 | 60% |
| Attention Seekers | 2 | 40% |

According to the discipline surveys at school C, the highest ranked probable cause

was that of poor classroom management techniques. Learning problems were also another highly ranked cause according to teachers. At school C, there was a high population of students who exhibited inappropriate classroom behaviors due to learning problems such as Attention Deficit Disorder, Hyperactivity, and Behavior Disorders. Another cause that the teachers stated in the survey was the nature of the disability itself that caused the child to be enrolled in an at-risk prekindergarten program. These children have no control over their emotions or their activity levels and therefore get into trouble faster.

The surveys offered other probable causes such as unstable home lives, past histories of children's sexual, physical or emotional abuse and attention seeking students, to explain the classroom misbehaviors. The past experiences of children must be included when their behavior is in question because they may not know how to behave in a given situation. Most of these children are not taught proper social behavior. Many homes were run by a single parent who often had other responsibilities outside of raising a child. Other children were in a foster situation, so one must take into consideration that they had not been in a stable setting for long periods of time, therefore they did not learn proper behavior skills. Teachers were also asked in the survey if they thought that inclusion of special education students was a contributing factor in the misbehaviors of their students. Four out of 5 stated that they felt it was; however, it was not ranked as a primary cause because of the students' labeled disability (ADD, ADHD, BD, EMH & DD).

Upon examining the data collected, teacher anecdotal records, teacher surveys and parental inquiries at the time of a screening, there is evidence that inappropriate behavior is a concern that may negatively affect a classroom. Looking at the causes of these misbehaviors in school C will help in locating solutions for the prekindergarten level in the literature.

## Literature Based Causes

The literature suggests several causes for disruptive behavior in the school setting. Some of the problems are rooted in issues that schools are currently facing while other problems have deeper roots in socioeconomic and family issues.

One issue that schools are dealing with is inclusion of special education students. One argument for the Regular Education Initiative (REI), which calls for the reform or radical reconstruction of special and general education, is that many students now served by special education may be taught in the regular education classes. Many regular education teachers are now teaching these special education students through mainstreaming and inclusion movements.

The problem arises that many teachers do not have aides to give these students the extra attention and time they require, nor do they have the special education training to deal with these students' special needs (Burke, 1992). Many of these students are unable to follow classroom standards. They may be unaware of the expectations of the regular classroom teacher about appropriate behavior. According to Canter (1992), many teachers do not feel that they can deal with the behavior of students with special needs in a regular classroom. The demands of special education students coupled with those of the regular classroom are more than a teacher can handle without special training or the availability of support staff. If the needs of special education students are not met they may exhibit a greater frequency of inappropriate behavior.

Another issue facing schools that contributes to disruptive behavior is the increase of bilingual students. With increasing numbers of students speaking other languages and budget cuts which reduce the number of bilingual teachers and teacher aides, the classroom teacher may have as many as half of the students in the

class who are non-English speakers. Communication problems then can make classroom management problems more severe (Burke, 1992).

According to the 1995 Gallop Poll (Elam and Rose,1995), the public views overcrowding to be a problem in the schools. Overcrowding is a problem because there is not enough physical space to allow students to coexist. When overcrowding occurs, teachers and students become frustrated with the given conditions.

Also, teachers are unable to give adequate individualized attention to students. W A negative atmosphere paired with teachers' inability to monitor student behavior contributes to more frequent student misbehaviors.

Other major problems as viewed by the public, are fighting, gangs and violence in the community. These problems are being carried over into the schools. Thus, the frequency of school violence is increasing. Page's study (as cited in Burke, 1992), states that the Federal Center for Disease Control found that 1 of every 5 students carries some sort of weapon, and 1 in 20 carries a gun. Many students in today's society do not view school as a safe place and this contributes to the amount and frequency of weapons brought into school. Others bring weapons to school to try to "fit in" with their peers. Metal detectors, police guards, and high fences around schools have not had much success in stopping the occurrences of fighting and violence in the schools (Burke, 1992).

Research has shown that much of the violence occurring in schools has a direct relationship with TV/media violence. Violence is common in TV entertainment and with the average national viewing time being 7 1/2 hours daily, violence has become a serious concern for parents and teachers alike (Hepburn, 1995). The National Center for Juvenile Justice estimates that there were 247,000 violent crimes committed by minors in 1992. Studies say that before children are out of elementary school most have seen some 8,000 murders and 100,000 acts of violence on television. One

specific study done by Huesmann and Eron (1986 as cited in Hepburn) focused on the effects of media violence on 758 children in grades 1 through 3. The results showed that students' behavior was influenced by television particularly if the children viewed violent programming frequently. These children were often more unpopular with their peers and did poorly in their studies. Huesmann and Eron (as cited in Hepburn, 1995) have concluded through their many years of research that heavy exposure to media violence heavily influences children's lives and their subsequent adult lives.

Canter (1992) notes that the number of students being raised in poverty is growing at a rapid rate. Statistics show that there has been a steady rise in this rate every year. In 1987 the percent of children living in poverty, for all races, was 19.7, and by 1993 the percent had risen to 22.0 (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census and Economics, 1995). Economist Sylvia Ann Hewlett (as cited in Burke, 1992), found that more than 20% of all children are growing up in poverty. Poverty affects the amount of homeless children and children who are uninsured and therefore have little to no access to health care. Given the problems that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds face, many teachers feel that these students cannot be expected to live up to the same behavioral expectations as other students (Canter, 1992). Burke (1992) supports this by stating that without help early on, these students may experience failure in school due to serious learning and behavioral problems.

The American family continues to undergo changes. According to Hodgkinson (as cited in Burke, 1992), about fifteen million children are being raised by single mothers due to the high divorce rate and the increased number of unmarried women having children. These single mothers will have about one-third as much to spend on the needs of their children as children being raised by two parents. Eitzen (as cited by Burke, 1992) says, "children from single parent families are less likely to be high

achievers; they are consistently more likely to be late, truant, and subject to disciplinary action; and they are more that twice as likely to drop out of school" (p.588).

The lack of parental control or parental involvement is often linked with disruptive behavior in school. Canter(1992) notes that many of our students today come from homes where they are abused, neglected, or not academically supported, and many teachers believe that the effects of this type of home life cause students to be unable to meet behavioral expectations at school. Many students are not abused or neglected at home, but come from home environments where parents, for a variety of reasons, have very minimal control over their behavior (Canter, 1992).

## Summary

In the targeted classrooms, teachers have been able to narrow a list of probable causes based on the individual site, teacher surveys and interviews and teacher anecdotal records. Those causes are a lack of classroom management, or absence of a management plan. We see a lack of parental / family support; if the parents are not aware then they cannot support the work the school system is trying to accomplish. Learning problems are a broad cause; however, if a student has a lack of attention or is disruptive to the class then it is frustrating to him or her and to the teacher. Television/ media hold poor examples of today's society and create a false sense of right and wrong for many students. Students crave attention; therefore, students will act out if they are not receiving the attention they crave. Finally, students who lack social skills become frustrated when they do not understand certain etiquette that society dictates.

In conclusion, the following are probable causes of student misbehavior gathered from the professional literature. Inclusion of special education students in the regular classroom can lead to behavior problems. These students have a low frustration level, and when tasks become too difficult they act out. The increase in students who use

English as a second language and bilingual students has also led to an increase in behavior problems. These students have difficulties communicating or understanding what is being taught in the classroom. They may also come from a culture with different values or beliefs than the culture of the school. Schools with overcrowding problems do not have enough physical space for students to peacefully coexist. Students who go to school in fear of intimidation or physical harm may also misbehave. These students do not feel school is safe and may misbehave in order to be removed from the classroom. These students may also drop out. Students who live in poverty are another group who often become disruptive in the classroom. These students do not have basic life necessities such as food, or clothing. Many of these students are ignored or made fun of which leads to attention seeking misbehaviors. Finally, the changing family (single-parent homes, step-families) can lead to student misbehaviors. Students from these families tend to have a lack of parental control or involvement. The students may be on their own much of the time, allowing them to learn values from television or other outside influences.

After reviewing the probable causes of student misbehaviors generated from sites A, B, and C and the literature, a few commonalities emerge. Lack of parental support and the changing family status contribute to students' disruptive behavior. Also, learning problems can cause a frustration level in students that forces them to act out in negative ways. These negative actions manifest themselves then in the classroom setting.

# CHAPTER 3

## THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

### Review of the Literature

Discipline is often viewed as separate from education. This is not the case. "Discipline is learned and can be taught--indeed, must be taught. The challenge for educators and all adults then, is to help children develop skills of responsible behavior by creating an environment in which children may acquire those skills" (Wayson, DeVoss, Kaeser,Lasley, Pinnell; and the Phi Delta Kappa Commision on Discipline, 1982) A review of the literature suggests several solutions to the problem of student misbehavior. Teachers must have a discipline plan in mind before entering the school year.

According to Curwin and Mendler (1990), every discipline plan has in one form or another the following elements: goals, principles, rules, enforcement procedures, and an evaluation process. According to knowledgeable others, the following are models of discipline plans used widely in schools.

A generic discipline model is a basic discipline plan with rules and consequences built into it. These rules and consequences are not clearly defined, nor enforced. Students in classrooms with this model of discipline are supposed to learn not to break rules as a result of some consequences.

The obedience model of a classroom discipline plan requires students to follow

orders. This model relies on punishment as the primary intervention to misbehavior. A student in this classroom would ask, "What does the teacher want?" Teachers who use this model of classroom discipline use threats, scolding, detentions, and writing students' names on the chalkboard as punishment. The student in this room learns: "Don't get caught" and "It's not my responsibility."

Allen Mendler (1993) sites seven principles of a good discipline plan in his article "Discipline with Dignity in the Classroom: Seven Principles." The first principle is the **long term behavior change vs. the short term fix.** When children misbehave, they are telling us they need to be helped with learning. Teachers need to be prepared for student misbehavior and their causes before they happen. The second principle of discipline with dignity is that **teachers need to stop doing ineffective things.** Most teachers believe that they can control student misbehavior. Many students don't go along with classroom discipline procedures yet the teacher keeps implementing the same procedures. Teachers must be willing to change methods when something doesn't work. The third principle--**teachers should be fair, but not treat everyone the same way,** goes along with the second principle of changing methods to meet the needs of the individual students. Every student is different, therefore the way a teacher treats individual students should be different. Teaching children to be responsible stems from tailoring consequences to the child. Teachers should also inform parents of this practice. **Rules that make sense** is the fourth component of discipline with dignity. Rules that are viewed as stupid by students are the least likely to be followed. Rules should be the guidelines for success in the classroom, not the course of fear and disdain. The fifth principle states that **teachers should model what's expected.** Teachers are the role models for their students. The teachers must model the behaviors in everyday actions and interactions that they expect in their students. Mendler's sixth principle is that **responsibility is**

**more important than obedience.** If students are made to feel responsible for their behaviors. they are more likely to follow the rules. Obedience tells students that they are not to question or be different.

The final principle of discipline with dignity is the following: **always treat students with dignity.** Discipline techniques should be constructive, never destructive. Discipline techniques should enhance self-esteem, not destroy it. "The best decisions for managing student behavior are based on a value system that maintains the dignity of each student in all situations" (Curwin & Mendler, 1989).

The responsibility model of classroom discipline teaches students to make responsible choices. Students learn from experiences and decisions made in the past. This model emphasizes student control instead of teacher control. Students learn that they cause their own outcomes, and they have the power to choose the best alternatives (Curwin & Mendler, 1989).

Perhaps the best strategy when choosing a discipline model is to combine positive aspects of more than one model. Students need to have clear rewards and consequences. They also need to take and be taught to have responsibility for their actions. Students must be given the opportunity to learn from their mistakes. Finally, all students should be recognized for their appropriate behaviors as a way for them to internalize how to act appropriately.

Curriculum is an integral part of managing a classroom effectively. According to Kohn (1993), a curriculum that is designed with connections to children's lives will positively impact student behavior. Examples of this type of curriculum are the whole-language movement, the emphasis on "learner-centered" learning, and the entire constructivist tradition. Kohn believes that if children are given real choices about their studies and provided with opportunities to work with and help one another, boredom in school will be avoided, students will be more motivated, and less inappropriate

behavior will occur (Kohn, 1993).

Canter agrees that a curriculum that relates to students has more meaning than facts and will therefore motivate groups to work together reducing behavior problems. If material is boring or confusing, students have a tendency to misbehave or act out more (Canter, 1996).

One important cause of the increase in violence occurring in school is thought to be the violence that children are viewing through the media. Hepburn (1995) offers some ideas that can help students develop some critical media skills. One idea would be to begin by taking a poll of students in a class to find out what their favorite TV channels are for a later study of contents. Students can be assigned different TV listings in magazines or newspapers to determine how many minutes a day are designated for different types of programs. Discussions of the kinds of violent acts and language in television programs and movies can prepare students to "monitor" violence in TV programs. Students can also discuss how violence affects viewers. These activities can help students to develop important media skills and cause students to be more aware of violence on TV. Through discussions, students may become more sensitive to TV and media violence (Kohn, 1993).

Cooperative learning is beneficial to all students because it encourages them to become independent learners and to develop the social skills necessary for life (Burke, 1992). Cooperative learning also helps to curb some behavior problems. It helps to build a sense of belonging in the school and a sense of caring and concern. When students have these feelings, it is not necessary to seek acceptance or become a behavioral problem in hopes of attracting attention (Burke, 1992).

Other researchers agree that cooperative learning positively effects student behavior. Data revealed that early programs done by Johnson and Johnson (as cited in Bellanca and Fogarty, 1991) had improved student to student interaction. The data

also revealed that there were considerable increases in students' academic achievement as well as positive effects in students' self-esteem (Bellanca & Fogarty, 1991).

Johnson found that students improved their self-esteem, school liking, and motivation because of cooperative experiences (Bellanca & Fogarty, 1991). It was also found that because cooperative learning structures positive interactions and nurtures positive peer relationships, students in cooperative learning classrooms developed more positive peer relationships and more pro-social behavior (Johnson, 1979; Johnson and Matross, as cited in Bellanca & Fogarty, 1991).

Teaching social skills is an integral part of such activities as conflict resolution and cooperative learning. Many researchers believe that teaching social skills is very worthwhile and beneficial to students. According to Burke (1992), students who are taught cooperative social skills are likely to develop interpersonal skills and self-esteem. If the framework for a caring and cooperative classroom is provided, then students can begin to deal with their own discipline problems, problems within their small group, and whole class problems (Burke, 1992).

Conflict resolution is a strategy in which students are taught not to avoid conflicts but how to handle them. Teaching social skills that go along with conflict resolution enables students to listen to one another, and to possibly disagree, but without alienating one another. It is not the goal of conflict resolution to teach students not to disagree. The process of disagreeing while employing social skills will help the students develop critical thinking skills and help students prepare to live in a society full of diversity and controversy (Burke, 1992).

According to Canter (1996), in order to have a good classroom one must have a good rapport with students. A mutual respect between teacher and student plays an important role in effective classroom management. Modeling appropriate behavior,

trust, and respect must be taught to students so that they become aware of an appropriate classroom atmosphere.

Students need to learn responsible behavior and it is up to teachers to teach them how to choose responsible behavior (Canter, 1992). There is a difference between students simply following the rules and students learning what behaviors are expected of them. Students should be able to choose responsible behavior on their own. Canter states, If students are to be successful in the real world they must be capable of making independent, responsible choices. (1992)

Burke (1992) agrees with this theory: students who learn the responsibility model of discipline treat others with respect and internalize positive behavior, not because it is a classroom rule, but because it is the right thing to do. As a result of this, misbehaviors are seen less frequently, and the students are choosing appropriate behaviors, not for external reasons, but because it has become a principle to them.

The main goal of the responsibility model is to teach students to make responsible choices. Curwin and Mendler (1990) believe that students should be involved in developing their classroom discipline plan. This fosters critical thinking and promotes shared decision-making. Children feel that they have some control over what happens to them in the classroom which can reduce misbehaviors that are a result of a power struggle (Curwin & Mendler, 1990).

In the obedience model of discipline, students are told to follow the rules without question. Punishments are given those students who misbehave. Contrary to this, the responsibility model gives students the opportunity to make choices and also the opportunity to make mistakes and learn from them (Curwin & Mendler, 1990). When students are given these opportunities, they begin to learn responsible behaviors internally.

The goal of Canter's (1992) model, assertive discipline, is to teach students to

choose responsible behavior which will therefore increase their academic success and raise their self-esteem. This behavior program is based on consistency and positive reinforcement. The three main components of the program are as follows:

1. Establish rules and procedures to clearly define the limits of acceptable and unacceptable student behavior.

2. Teach students to follow the rules and procedures consistently throughout the year.

3. Ask for assistance from parents and administrators when support is needed (Canter, 1992).

Assertive discipline has changed over the past 20 years to incorporate more of the challenges facing students of today. Canter (1996) says that the basic principles are still in place; however, certain points have evolved. A sharper definition is made between rules and directions. Both are in effect at most times during the day and are needed for students to be successful in all activities. Redirection of off-task behavior may be the key to reducing discipline problems since off-task behavior does not require the same consequence as someone who is aggressively acting out (Canter, 1996).

Some researchers believe that assertive discipline is an ineffective strategy. Kohn (as cited in Brandt,1995) states that rewards and punishments are not beneficial because they manipulate student behavior. They are ways of doing things to students instead of students making decisions for themselves. If a person is continuously being rewarded for something, he or she will then have less interest in doing what was rewarded. Instead of punishments and rewards, children deserve an engaging curriculum and a caring atmosphere so that they can act on their natural desire to explore new things. Kohn also believes that giving students choices and asking them to think about their decisions is more effective than rewards and punishments (Brandt,

1995).

Curwin and Mendler (1989) agree with this view and state that in assertive discipline the teacher has all the power to define the rules and to distribute rewards and punishments. They state that students are not allowed any input into the process. Instead of this, a truly effective discipline plan should include not only rules, rewards, and consequences, but it must send a message of respect, dignity, hope, and belief.

Positive reinforcement is an integral part of a classroom discipline plan. It takes place when the teacher gives a student sincere and meaningful attention for behaving according to the expectations of the members of the class (Canter, 1992). If positive reinforcement is used consistently it will have a positive effect on student behavior. Some results of this strategy will be:

1. Students will be encouraged to behave appropriately.
2. Students will have increased self-esteem.
3. Behavior problems will be dramatically reduced.
4. A positive classroom climate will be created for both teacher and students.
5. Teacher will be able to teach behavior more effectively and be able to establish positive relationships with students (Canter, 1992).

The most meaningful method of positive reinforcement is verbal praise. Praise needs to be personal, it needs to reflect the teacher's own feelings of pride, and be descriptive and specific. Another method of positive reinforcement is behavior awards. These notes, certificates, and bookmarks congratulate students for positive behavior. Students should be proud to receive awards and also to take them home to their parents. Another way teachers can recognize positive student behavior is through giving students special privileges. It is extremely important for teachers to find out what their students like to do for this to be an effective form of positive recognition. Tangible rewards are another method of positive reinforcement. This method is

particularly effective with students who have not responded to other forms of positive reinforcement. These guidelines should be followed when giving tangible rewards. First, the reward must be given immediately after observing the desired behavior. Secondly, teachers should always pair the reward with the verbal praise (Canter, 1992).

Strong home-school ties with parents support a well-established discipline plan. Parents and teachers who are actively involved in the discipline process and work together can solve discipline problems before they become a major concern. According to Canter (1992), there are two components to successfully involve parents. The first component is for teachers to communicate their discipline plan with parents. Parents need to know the teacher's expectations to be able to support them from home. Teachers should also attempt to handle problems that arise before asking parents for help. Secondly, student behavior should also be documented, and the steps taken by the teacher to handle the problem as well. Parents should also be notified of student misbehavior as well as positive behavior.

The students' home environment has a definite impact on learning and classroom behavior. The objective of the teacher is to teach the curriculum to students; however, there needs to be a support system to back up these goals and objectives. This interaction between home and school base is important, as a study by Phi Delta Kappa Commission on Discipline (1982) has shown. Discipline as well as student academic performance improve with parental involvement.

The strategies for integrating community and school system range from the simplest to the most complex. An example of a simple strategy is written communication with a parent. A complex strategy may be inviting parents and surrounding community members to school functions.

Positive school atmosphere is central to preventing discipline problems and is

attained by using three major components. They are parental involvement, prevention, and intervention. Prevention strategies that were developed in a study by Herndon (1995) included (a) teachers contacting parents, (b) development of student/teacher relationships, (c) peer facilitators, (d) self-help films, (e) signs reminding students what is expected of them, (f) and teachers' duties increased to incorporate more supervisional duties.

Many schools found misbehavior such as insubordination, fighting, and truancy decreased when parents were more actively involved. A study by Wagner and Guttmann (1994) showed that students at all income levels made improvements when parents were involved in activities such as fund raising, homework help, and after school activities. Positive changes, greater organizational structure, and improved attitudes are also outcomes of active parental involvement. Phi Delta Kappa Commission on Discipline (1982) cites that improving available facilities and organization can help to support efforts to improve school discipline.

Parents can also be used to deter the growing trend of violence in schools by becoming well informed. Parents can make appropriate programming decisions when it comes to what and how much their children watch on television. According to the American Psychological Association Task Force that looked at more than 1000 surveys, studies, and commentaries, the accumulated research indicates that there is a correlation between the viewing of violent material and aggressive behavior--regular viewers behave more aggressively than occasional ones (Comer,1993).

The following suggestions are given by researchers to help parents with this problem. The first suggestion is for parents to provide adequate supervision. Another suggestion is for parents to establish rules by which their children will abide. Finally, parents should have open discussions about the programs that their children are viewing (Wagner & Guttmann, 1995, Comer, 1993).

In summary, discipline problems can be avoided if students have a clear understanding of classroom rules. Teachers who have a clear discipline plan with rewards and consequences will have fewer discipline problems. There are conflicting views about rewards. Some researchers state that rewards should be intrinsic while others say that rewards should be extrinsic. Positive reinforcement is a key component of classroom management, whether verbal or tangible. Parental involvement is also central to a positive classroom environment.

## Project Objectives

As a result of implementing modified classroom management procedures during the period of September 1996 to December 1996, the prekindergarten, first grade and fifth grade students from the targeted classes will decrease the frequency of inappropriate behavior that interferes with a positive classroom environment. Behavior will be measured by checklists, student referrals by the teacher to the principal, teacher ancedotal records and a list of parental contacts.

In order to accomplish the project objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. Develop a classroom discipline plan outlining the rules and consequences.
2. Model appropriate behaviors in the classroom.
3. Teach problem-solving and intrapersonal decision-making skills.
4. Implement positive reinforcement strategies regularly.
5. Involve parents through communication.

## Project Action Plan

In order to accomplish the objective of the modified classroom management the following processes were necessary. Classroom rules were developed by the prekindergarten (Appendix F), first grade (Appendix G), and fifth grade (Appendix H) in the month of August prior to the start of the school year. Each teacher developed classroom rules based on the desired behaviors for his/her individual grade level.

Teachers developed classroom rules with the following commonalities: respect toward the teacher, respect toward one another, staying on-task, and consistently completing assignments.

Each teacher of the targeted classes taught and explained the classroom rules during the first two days of school. The teachers also explained the clear consequences for classroom rule violations. The necessity for clear consequences is based on Curwin and Mendler(1988).

Rules and Consequences

In the targeted prekindergarten classroom the following was the violation/ consequence plan:

1. 1st violation- verbal warning or redirect student behavior
2. 2nd violation- verbal warning
3. 3rd violation- time out for set amount of time
4. 4th violation- note or phone call home
5. In the prekindergarten classroom homework notices are unnecessary since formal homework assignments are not given.

In the targeted 1st grade classroom, the following was the violation/consequence plan: A color-coded card system was used for tracking behavior(Appendix I)(Canter, 1992). Each student had his or her name written on a library pocket which contained five pieces of paper: a school zone card, a green card, yellow card, red card, and a white ticket. At the beginning of each day the cards were placed in each student's pocket in that order with the school zone card in the front. When a rule was broken the following consequences resulted:

1. 1st violation- student received a warning and placed the school zone card behind the others so that the green card was shown.
2. 2nd violation- student placed the green card in the back to show the yellow card

and works away from the group for five minutes.

3. 3rd violation- student placed the yellow card in the back to show the red card and works away from the group for ten minutes.
4. 4th violation- student placed the red card in back to show the white ticket. The rules that the student violated were marked on the white ticket which then was signed by a parent and returned to school. (Appendix J)
5. Severe Clause- The student misbehavior was extreme to the extent that removal from the classroom was necessary. A white ticket was also issued for either a severe clause or homework packet not turned in on time.

These consequences were given for violations occurring on a daily basis. Each student began each day with a school zone card. Parents were informed of their child's behavior on a daily basis. At the end of each day, the students removed the card that was showing in their pockets and took it home to share with their parents. Only white cards were required to be signed and returned to school.

In the targeted 5th grade classroom, the following was the violation/consequence plan:

1. 1st violation- verbal warning (daily)
2. 2nd violation- name is written down (daily)
3. 3rd violation- 1/2 hour detention after school

Incomplete assignments were dealt with as follows:

1. A child with any missing assignment received a "Homework Notice" that notified a parent and required a parent signature
2. A child with three Homework Notices received a 1/2 hour detention

The classroom rules were displayed clearly.

## Modeling Classroom Rules

Appropriate behaviors that were expected of students were modeled by the teachers (Curwin & Mendler, 1988; Canter,1996). Throughout the implementation of the action plan, modeling as a technique was used on a daily basis in various forms. One example was that teachers constantly modeled respect by treating all students with respect. Modeling was also used for specified behaviors to be taught through role playing and cooperative lessons. In the targeted classrooms examples of inappropriate behaviors were:

1. insubordination- student refusal to follow teachers direction,
2. verbal aggression- student verbally attacked another student in class, ie. name calling.
3. physical aggression- student physically attacked another student in class, ie. pushing.
4. off task - student was actively involved in an activity other than what was assigned.
5. incomplete assignments- student did not have an assignment that was either homework or class work or was unprepared for class.

## Parent Involvement

Teachers in the prekindergarten, 1st-grade, and 5th-grade classrooms involved parents with various forms of communication. (Canter,1992; Herndon, 1995; Wagner & Guttmann, 1995) Each teacher sent a copy of the classroom rules home with the students during the first week of school. Parents were then be asked to sign a slip that they had reviewed these rules with their child. Positive notes and positive phone calls were carried out for good behavior when appropriate. Parents were encouraged to give feedback on Open House Night held during the first month of school. All contact with parents was logged, including contact initiated by parents. These interventions

were carried out from September 1996 through December 1996.

Problem Solving/Decision Making Skills

Decision making (problem-solving) was taught to the prekindergarten, 1st-grade and 5th-grade students through direct instruction. (Bellanca and Fogarty, 1991 and Burke, 1992)

The prekindergarten class explored problem solving techniques starting with the first week of school. Verbal discussion and visual charts of the rules and modeling was an ongoing process. The use of teacher modeling, role playing, and puppets illustrated the idea that the child should develop a good sense of responsible decision making. The intent was that the students should try to become more assertive by putting a stop to undesirable or unwanted situations that affected them. Some examples of student responses taught were "Stop that please", "I don't like that ", and "You may not do that to me". The intent was the students solved their own problems resulting in the building of self-esteem.

Once a week starting with the first week of school, in the 1st- and 5th-grade classrooms, a different rule was explored through a problem solving process. Students were given hypothetical situations such as, one student hitting another student while in cooperative groups, or a group of students excluding another group of students during free choice activities. The students chose the rule violation in the given situation and the appropriate consequence. In the targeted 1st- and 5th-grade classrooms the following time line was followed:

Weeks 1,2,3- Situational problems that arise

Weeks 4,5,6- Respect toward the teacher

Weeks 7,8,9- Student to student respect

Weeks 10,11,12- Staying on task

Weeks 13,14,15- Assignment completion

Weeks 16,17- Turning in best work

During the first 3 weeks of school a variety of modeling techniques were used to explore various situations. This included the use of cooperative learning, role playing, and group discussion. Weeks 4,5, & 6 focused on student respect toward the teacher. This plan was carried out through the use of modeling specific situations and role-play dialogues. Then weeks 7,8, & 9 explored ways to improve student-to-student respect through cooperative learning, using literature, or the use of puppetry. Weeks 10, 11, & 12 showed students appropriate on-task behaviors through special cues and using physical proximity or verbal reminders. (Canter,1996) In weeks 13, 14, &15 the students brain stormed possible solutions to figure out what could be done if a book is left at school when it is needed for an assignment, and students learned to establish a daily routine for becoming organized at the end of the day. Finally, the students learned how to consistently do their best work by reviewing a completed task and identifying their best work in weeks sixteen and seventeen. Small groups of three to five students were used to explore these situations. Once all classroom rules had been covered in this way, school specific problems were addressed as well.

The content of the problem solving intervention was as follows:

1. Identify the 'real' problem
2. Brainstorm ideas to solve the problem
3. Choose the 'best' solution
4. Transfer to new situations.(Bellanca & Fogarty, 1991)

The problem solving process used in the prekindergarten classroom was as follows:

1. Teacher identifies the problem such as, one student taking away a toy from another student, and shares the problem with the students.
2. Students discuss as a whole group, why it is a problem for the class.
3. Whole group discussion of possible solutions.

4. The most appropriate solution is decided by the group and the teacher records the solution and posts it for the class.

The process to be used in 1st- and 5th-grades on a weekly basis was as follows:

1. Teacher will model the problem solving process.
2. Students will be placed in heterogeneous groups of 3-5.
3. All groups will follow the Bellanca and Fogarty five step problem solving process and come up with a solution.
4. Group members will brainstorm and share ideas until a solution is agreed upon.
5. Once all groups have finished, each group will share its solution with the rest of the groups.

For a sample lesson, see Appendix K.

Problem solving/decision making instruction were carried on from September 1996 through December 1996.

Positive Reinforcement

The teachers in the targeted prekindergarten, 1st-grade, and 5th-grade classrooms implemented various forms of positive reinforcement on a daily basis.(Canter, 1992) Positive reinforcement included verbal praise, tangible rewards, special privileges, or a letter/note or phone call to parents (Appendixes L-Q ). Positive reinforcement was used to recognize appropriate classroom behavior such as following rules.

In the targeted prekindergarten classroom, the following methods of positive reinforcement were implemented:

1. Verbal praise.
2. Tangibles, eg. stickers or hand stamps, etc.
3. Positive notes or phone calls to parents.
4. Hugs or high-fives.
5. Assignment of a popular job or task.

In the targeted 1st-grade classroom, the following methods of positive reinforcement were implemented:

1. Verbal praise.
2. Tangibles, eg. stickers, bookmarks, or small erasers, etc.
3. Positive notes or phone calls to parents.
4. Behavior awards or certificates.
5. Special privilege coupons: computer pass, line leader, lunch with the teacher, etc.
6. Class wide activity, for example, videos, free time, special projects, etc., as a result of the whole group earning a preestablished number of points.

In the targeted 5th-grade classroom, these are examples of positive reinforcement that were implemented:

1. Verbal praise
2. Tangible rewards, ie., homework pass, computer pass
3. Positive notes and phone calls to parents
4. Special privileges, ie., class helper, office helper

The positive reinforcement component was an integral part of the modified classroom management strategy and was used daily from September 1996 through December 1996.

## Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of the modified classroom behavior program, behavioral checklists, parental contacts, tallied numbers of office referrals, and teacher anecdotal records were used.(Appendix R) Included in the teacher anecdotal records were student misbehaviors that were tallied and recorded on a daily basis. The behaviors were recorded into specific categories as well as the number of observable student misbehaviors.

Records were kept of parental contacts regarding both positive and negative behaviors. Contact included telephone calls, notes, and parent/teacher conferences. During the program time a tally was kept of the referrals made to the office of the student's misbehaviors and teachers kept anecdotal records of all observed misbehaviors.

# CHAPTER 4

# PROJECT RESULTS

## Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this project was to decrease the frequency of inappropriate behavior that interferes with a positive classroom environment. The solution chosen to meet this objective was three-fold. First, a classroom discipline plan with clear rules, rewards, and consequences was developed by each researcher. Second, problem solving and intrapersonal decision-making skills were taught to students. Finally, positive reinforcement strategies were implemented regularly.

At all three elementary sites, a classroom discipline plan with clear rules was clearly and openly displayed in each room, and a copy of these rules was sent home with each student the first day of school. Parents were expected to go over the classroom rules with their child and sign a slip that was returned to the teacher. (Appendixes F, G, & H) This insured early contact between home and school. Each teacher kept a checklist of specific misbehaviors in order to collect data. (Appendix R ) This checklist was filled out on a daily basis.

At school A the original discipline plan involved the following violation/ consequence procedure. First violation: students received a verbal warning (daily), second violation: student's name was written down daily, third violation: students received a 1/2 hour detention. The original plan was changed because the teacher/researcher felt students did not realize they were in jeopardy of a detention after the second warning. The second violation consequence was changed to a conference with the student and the loss of a privilege. This conference with the

student verified a second rule violation and placed more responsibility on the student.

The consequence plan at School B involved the following violation/consequence procedures. First violation: the students changed school zone card and received a warning (daily), second violation: student moved green card and worked away from the group for five minutes. For the third and fourth violations the student changed the colored card and received ten and fifteen minutes away from the group consecutively. The fourth violation and a severe clause both involved sending a white ticket home to be signed and returned by the parents.

The prekindergarten classroom involved a violation/consequence plan as well. The first violation was a verbal warning or redirection of student behavior. Second violation was a verbal warning, third violation was a time out, and the fourth violation resulted in a note or phone call home.

Problem-solving and intrapersonal decision-making skills were taught to students at all three sites. This component of the intervention was taught in a forty-five minute lesson once a week. The model used for problem solving was Bellanca and Fogarty's six step problem solving method. At the 1st- and 5th-grade levels, problem solving exploration was done in cooperative groups and at the pre-k level, problem solving was done by teacher example and through role play. Teachers developed a time line in which various student misbehaviors and day to day classroom concerns would be explored. Students would then identify the problem, brainstorm and decide as a group what the best approach to solving the problem would be. After each problem solving lesson, individual students filled out a journal stem starter or a PMI chart reflecting on the lesson. Problems were introduced and explored through puppet shows and role playing allowing the prekindergarten students to be actively involved and then they were given time to discuss their feelings after the lesson. A sample lesson can be found in Appendix K. In the first three weeks, situational problems that arose were

discussed. Student respect toward the teacher was then covered for three weeks. The following three weeks targeted student to student respect. Staying on task and assignment completion were then covered, each for three weeks. Finally, turning in best work was targeted.

Three weeks into the intervention, the original six step problem-solving model was reduced to three steps. This was done at all three sites. The steps removed from the original six step plan were the following; sense the problem, prioritize solutions, and transfer to new situations. Students were having difficulty with the completion of the six steps because the lack of time, and the abstract nature of these steps caused confusion. The modified plan included these steps: Identify the 'real' problem, brainstorm ideas, and plan the action. The hope of the teachers was to center the students on the problem at hand and away from the completion of six complex steps.

Positive reinforcement strategies were implemented regularly at all three sites. This positive reinforcement included both tangible rewards and verbal praise such as stickers, hand stamps, positive notes to a child's parent, behavior awards and certificates, bookmarks, erasers, and a computer use pass (Appendixes L-Q). Verbal praise was used frequently to recognize students for good behavior. Students were also rewarded by being given special privileges such as free time, videos, or running errands to the office. Teachers used these positive reinforcement strategies randomly, trying to recognize all students 'caught being good'.

## Presentation and Analysis of Results

### School A

In order to assess the effects of the positive classroom intervention, teacher anecdotal notes, journal logs and a daily tally of student misbehaviors were maintained throughout the intervention. The daily tallies were compiled into weekly totals. At the end of the data-collection time period, the weekly totals were aggregated

by month to yield monthly totals. Table 4 is a presentation of this data. The data in Table 4 was collected from August 1996 to December 1996. Note that August and September totals have been combined.

Table 4. Total Number of Misbehavior Incidents

School A - 5th grade

| Behavior | August/September | October | November | December |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Insubordination | 6 | 5 | 2 | 0 |
| Physical Aggression | 3 | 11 | 1 | 5 |
| Verbal Aggression | 4 | 7 | 3 | 2 |
| Off Task | 65 | 37 | 25 | 24 |
| No Assignment | 34 | 36 | 20 | 10 |

Student-to-teacher insubordination involves blatant disrespect from the student to the teacher. Examples of insubordination are talking back to the teacher, defiance or visual display of poor attitude. Table 4, shows that there was a decrease in student to teacher insubordination during the intervention. The largest number of incidents of insubordination occurred in August/September. After this, the number of incidents decreased monthly and by December, there were no incidents of insubordination. It should be pointed out that in August and September, 75% of the insubordination came from two students. One student was a new student to the district; the other student was in a much less structured 4th-grade classroom than 5th-grade classroom. The effect of the cooperative problem-solving intervention can also be seen in Table 4. In November and December, lessons on teacher-to-student respect were taught. Students also looked at ways in which their teacher was not being treated with respect. Students participated in role playing activities in which they treated their teacher with respect. November and December have the lowest total of incidents of student to teacher insubordination.

Students who are physically aggressive to one another are dangerous to themselves as well as to others. These students may kick, punch, trip, hit, and push other students. In November and August/September the numbers were low. In October and December the number of incidents were high. The problem solving component of this intervention never covered physical aggression among students or between one another.

Verbal aggression between students can disrupt a classroom. Students who argue with one another or call each other names take away from a positive classroom environment. Table 4 shows that incidents of verbal aggression between students also decreased during the four-month intervention. In both August/September and October there were a larger number of incidents of verbal aggression. The teacher can find no probable cause for the highest number (7) in October. The problem solving intervention explored the issue of student-to-student respect early on, but the effects of it cannot be seen until later in the intervention.

The teacher/researcher was diligent about finding students who were off-task and redirecting them. The teacher defined the off task behavior for the purpose of this project as a student who was actively engaged in an activity other than what he/she was supposed to be doing. Examples of off-task behavior are daydreaming, talking, or working on something other than the assigned tasks. According to Table 4, off-task behavior decreased nearly 65% during the four-month period. In August/September there were 65 incidents of observed off-task behavior. The number of students observed as being "off-task" decreased during the months of intervention. Problem solving also addressed this issue, and students were positively reinforced when caught off-task. Many incidents of off-task behavior can be attributed to the same group of five students. These students were observed to be off-task, but when positively redirected back to class work they were able to maintain working on task for

longer periods of time.

Students who do not complete homework assignments take away from their own learning as well as discussions with those class members who have completed their assignments. The data in Table 4 shows that there was a steady decrease in the number of incidents of students not having their assignments. In the months of August/September and October, the incidents of no assignments are high, but drop to less than one third of August/September's total by December.

Although it is not reported in the data, close contact between the teacher/researcher and parents was maintained. Every student in the class received at least two positive notes for good behavior. The teacher/researcher also made several positive phone calls to parents over the length of the intervention. Parents were also made aware of every homework assignment not done by being given a 'homework notice'. A warm, friendly rapport with parents was established. The teacher/researcher received many positive comments from parents in appreciation for recognizing their child. They were also appreciative of the time that it took to write or call. This was also the first time in the teacher/researcher's career that every parent attended parent-teacher conferences in the fall.

School B

Table 5. Total Number of Misbehavior Incidents

School B - 1st grade

| Behavior | August/September | October | November | December |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Insubordination | 21 | 19 | 13 | 5 |
| Physical Aggression | 4 | 4 | 4 | 6 |
| Verbal Aggression | 3 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| Off-Task | 19 | 36 | 25 | 9 |
| No Assignment | 3 | 5 | 2 | 1 |

The misbehavior of insubordination refers to students being disrespectful toward the teacher in such ways as defiance and talking back. Table 5 illustrates that each month there was a decrease in this type of student misbehavior during the intervention. The number of instances of insubordination decreased by 76% from August/September to December. This was the largest decrease of all behaviors, and also the only behavior to decrease each month.

Physical aggression included fighting, excessive pushing in line or other actions committed purposefully by one student which could harm another student. The number of these incidents remained the same each month from August/September to November (4) and increased in December to six. All of the incidents occurring between August and November were either students pushing or playing too rough at recess. In December, four out of six of the instances of physical aggression were attributed to one student. While this student had been in the classroom all year, a conversation with a parent revealed that the student was experiencing a major family change. The behavior of physical aggression was discussed and role played during the second week of school as it related to a school rule.

Incidents of verbal aggression between students included name calling, teasing and taunting. The number of these incidents was the same during the first and last months of the intervention. October (1) and November (0) had the lowest number of instances of verbal aggression. The cooperative problem solving intervention dealt with student-to-student respect for the last two weeks of October and the first week of November.

Off-task behavior had the greatest number of instances during the four month intervention by far. While the number in August/September was 19, it increased in October to 36. Two new students began that month, one on October 1st, and the other on October 7th. Both of these students had great difficulty adjusting to our daily procedures and routines, and they accounted for a large number of off-task behaviors such as getting out of their seat, singing, talking out, and not working on the assigned task. This behavior was addressed specifically during the last three weeks of November through cooperative problem-solving, role playing, modeling, and creating signals for one another. The students continued to use the signals regularly to help each other remain on task.

The completion of homework assignments was addressed specifically during the first three weeks of December. The teacher/researcher found that the number of instances decreased from August/September (3) to December (1). It was also found that almost 90% of all instances were committed by two students. The teacher/researcher could find no cause for the greatest number of instances (5) to occur in October.

Another aspect of the intervention dealt with parent communication. At the beginning of the year each student took home the school rules and consequences which were discussed with and signed by both parent and student. During the course of the intervention, each parent received at least one positive phone call and each

student received at least one positive note to take home. This established a good rapport and set the stage for the school year. Parents were also notified of homework assignments not turned in, severe misbehaviors, and repeated misbehaviors through white tickets. All parents were very supportive when misbehaviors were communicated, and they were very appreciative of the positive comments. Every parent attended parent/teacher conferences in the fall and Home School plans were developed for students demonstrating needs. The teacher/researcher and parents then worked together to address the student needs.

School C

Table 6. Total Number of Misbehavior Incidents
School C - Pre-k

| Behavior | August/September | October | November | December |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Insubordination | 46 | 40 | 31 | 24 |
| Physical aggression | 29 | 15 | 9 | 7 |
| Verbal aggression | 18 | 17 | 23 | 14 |
| Off-task | 42 | 36 | 43 | 31 |
| No assignment | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |

Insubordination at the preschool level refers to students who are observed to be disrespectful to the teacher by blatantly ignoring the classroom rules and directions given by the teacher, talking back, and leaving the classroom without permission. Table 6 shows that with each month there was a steady decrease in this type of misbehavior during the intervention. The year seemed to start with an unusually high number of misbehaviors, but the teacher/researcher attributes this to two factors. First, at this age level it is often the child's first experience with a classroom and specific rules that need to be followed and second, the children are learning to get along with their peers in a large group and often imitate a student who is misbehaving.

Defining physical aggression for a young child may include pushing, putting

hands on one another in an uncomfortable manner, grabbing at or taking something away from another student, and any other action that may cause harm to another student. Table 6 shows a dramatic decrease with every month of the intervention. Despite the fact that new students were added to the classroom during the entire period, this was one area that continued to decline. Most of the incidents that occurred from August/September through December were grabbing or taking a toy or other object away from another child. The numbers for November (9) and December (7), can be attributed to the behaviors of three students in a class limited to the size of 15. Verbal and visual cues were often used and then reviewed with each student one-on-one.

The occurrences of student-to-student and student-to-teacher verbal aggression included name calling, swearing, and teasing. The number of these incidents went up and down during the intervention and was at its highest mark during November (23) and at its lowest number in December (14). The teacher/researcher attributes the high numbers in November to the fact that because of many days off during the month,many of the children came back to class having forgotten the rules of school and the relearning had to occur all over again. The lowest numbers during December are attributed to the preparation for the holiday season and the children being aware that they "should be good for Santa is watching". Modeling appropriate behavior and the use of puppet demonstrations to the children showed them how this type of misbehavior hurts the feelings of the other person. Most children were able to identify with this aspect of the intervention; however, there were three students who were lacking in the comprehension skills necessary to incorporate this knowledge into their daily routine. Other children were able to understand the concept and followed through by telling someone that they were unhappy at the way they were being spoken to.

There were a high number of incidents of off-task behavior. The rise occurred in November (43) from the previous month, October (36), and then the statistics fell again for December (31). In the preschool classroom these behaviors are often defined as not using the toys in the appropriate manner, not using inside voices, going to centers that are not open for the day, and not following through with an activity to its completion.

The completion of homework assignments is not listed as a misbehavior for the preschool class because they do not receive homework papers to complete and return to school. At most they may receive fun projects to do with their parents as reviews of the materials covered in class; however, they are not required to return them for a grade.

Parental communication was considered by the teacher/researcher to be the most important aspect in the intervention process. At the beginning of the year each parent received a copy of the classroom rules and were asked to review these with their child. During the course of the intervention each parent received at least one positive phone call about their child's progress and every student received at least one positive note to go home to their parents about their behavior. Parents were generally delighted to receive good news about their child and through this a good rapport was developed between parents and teacher. This set the stage for parents to listen to the teacher when a problem was brought up later on about the child's progress. Seventy-five percent of parents attended the parent-teacher conferences in the fall and others were seen through the programs' home visiting days. Most parents and the teacher worked together to support the preschool program, and those who had a difficult time were referred to the psychologist for additional help with parenting skills.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

School A

Based on the presentation and analysis of the data on frequencies of misbehaviors the students showed an improvement in all categories of behavior except physical aggression. It is concluded that the key to improving the classroom environment is for the teacher to establish his or her expectations from the first day of school. The teacher should have a discipline plan and make students aware of that plan. Classroom rules should be openly discussed with students so that students know why a rule is a rule. This teaching of expectations and rules helped lead to the positive results of this intervention. Once students had a clear idea of the rules and expectations, the teacher consistently enforced the rules in order to establish a positive and friendly classroom environment.

Positive reinforcement can improve the environment of many classrooms. Positive reinforcement was used in school A often and in different forms to obtain positive results. Students were happy when the teacher/researcher recognized a student for being well-behaved. This recognition was also a good self-esteem booster. The students in the 5th-grade classroom were happy and willing to help the teacher in any way they could. They liked the fact that they were being recognized for 'being good'. Many students showed off their awards or notes to parents. The students were genuinely happy to please their teacher.

The assembly of cooperative base-groups was a key to the success of the problem-solving component of this intervention. The groups worked well together and consistently went about their tasks with maturity and enthusiasm. Students were able to see and discuss several ways to manage problems that could occur. Students were also able to learn the social skills of being a good listener, taking turns, and using six inch voices. Students also liked the problem-solving intervention. After the last

problem-solving intervention in December, they begged the teacher to continue. The teacher/researcher has since started the activity again largely due to the fact that the 5th graders had more maturity to process this information.

Overall, the amount of time spent on discipline problems decreased. This left more time to teach lessons and had a positive effect on the overall classroom environment. Because the students had experiences working in cooperative groups, they were able to draw on their experiences and work cooperatively in other areas.

There were certain students who seemed too needy to be affected by the intervention strategies. No matter what the intervention, these students will most likely remain the hardest to reach. It is hard to accept the fact that every student has not benefited from the positive classroom environment but it is true. No matter how hard one tries, these students will probably continue to require help beyond what the classroom teacher is able to provide.

The positive classroom intervention presented here was highly successful. The intervention could be even more successful in decreasing the number of physical aggression and off-task behavior. More time could be devoted to problem-solving. For instance, teachers could include two 45-minute periods a week instead of one. This would double the amount of problem-solving topics covered in the same amount of time. This way a teacher could address areas that are of particular concern in his or her classroom.

A daily tally of misbehaviors was time consuming and impractical. A recommendation is to choose one or two days a week to collect data. The observer could then pay closer attention to the students in action. Cooperative groups must work well together for the problem-solving intervention to be successful. If problems in cooperative groups arise they must be corrected right away. The success of this component hinges on the cooperation of the base group.

A drawback to sending notes home for good behavior is that neighboring students sometimes seemed disappointed when they did not receive one. A suggestion would be to confer with the student who received the note, congratulate him or her and then suggest that the note be put in a safe place so it is not lost.

This intervention confirmed the principle that students must learn to solve problems on their own, follow classroom rules, and be rewarded for the good things they do. Positive discipline strategies can enrich classroom life for both teachers and students.

School B

Based on the presentation and analysis of the data on frequencies of misbehaviors by month, the students showed improvements in the categories of insubordination, off-task, and assignment completion, and remained the same in verbal aggression. These four categories were addressed specifically for at least three weeks each during the intervention, while the behavior which increased was concentrated on only one week.

The teacher/researcher concluded that it is necessary to begin the school year with clear expectations for the students. These expectations need to be conveyed to the students through rules and consequences beginning on the first day and continuously thereafter. From there it is essential that the classroom discipline plan is implemented consistently and fairly so that students are able to feel safe and respected.

Positive reinforcement can add to this desired environment by increasing students' self-esteem as well as showing other students good modeling. The 1st-grade students truly enjoyed receiving stickers, special privileges, and phone calls to parents. But because positive reinforcement was very random, the students did not work toward it or expect it. They were, however, very pleased when their positive behavior was recognized.

The methods of intervention used were very effective in decreasing student misbehavior. It is very important for the teacher to always be a good model, as well as for the teacher to ask students to model desired behaviors. Role playing seemed to be the most effective intervention. The 1st-grade students enjoyed discussing the situations. Being able to either act out or watch others in various situations was a very concrete way to show and discuss specific behaviors as well as solve the problems. The cooperative problem-solving activities did not always seem to be effective. When products were yielded, the lessons were more effective. However due to the developmental abilities of the students combined with the topics, many of the problem-solving sessions focused on discussion which was more difficult for the students. One recommendation for students of this age would be to cover the same topics but as a whole group instead of cooperative groups. In this situation the teacher/researcher would be available to model and clarify the situations being discussed. The teacher/researcher also noted that it was difficult to form base groups as four students transferred out and five new students entered in all at various times throughout the intervention. Though the topics taught were appropriate for 1st-grade students, the frequency of the interventions may not have been enough. If a topic was covered only early in the intervention, the misbehaviors tended to increase toward the end of the intervention. A recommendation that could be made would be to spend more time reviewing previously taught topics to help students internalize the desired behaviors.

During the course of this intervention, much less time needed to be spent on dealing with student misbehaviors. This is largely due to the great decrease in the areas of insubordination and off-task behavior which can be the most disruptive behaviors in a classroom. The researcher attributes the large decrease of insubordination to two factors: role-playing and a positive rapport between teacher and students. Student-to-teacher respect was concentrated on during the first three

weeks of October through cooperative problem-solving, role-playing and modeling. Role playing had probably its greatest effect in this area. When students were asked to role play situations and literally act disrespectful or rude toward someone "playing" a teacher or principal, the reaction was strong. The 'audience' could not believe how disrespectful students acted toward the authority figure, even in the role playing situation. This event really stuck with the students and they talked about it often. The teacher/researcher also believes that the positive rapport built with students through clear and consistent rules and consequences had an effect on the decrease of instances of insubordination. Because the expectations of students were clear to them they never claimed that they were treated unfairly which seemed, in turn, to cause students to treat the teacher with respect.

Physical and verbal aggression do not typically occur during direct instruction but during more unstructured times such as transition or recess. The behavior of physical aggression was addressed for only one week early in the year. The teacher/researcher believes that this may be a cause for the instances of physical aggression not decreasing at all during the intervention. In the teacher/researcher's classroom the homework assignments aren't required to complete daily activities so that category did not affect teaching time.

While the overall result of the intervention was successful, there were a few students who had difficulty making improvements in the areas that were documented, despite the intervention. Individual interventions were implemented with two students by the teacher/researcher and there was some improvement with one of the students.

The teacher/researcher from school B felt that the daily tally sheet was an effective tool for measuring misbehaviors. It gave a complete picture of how the interventions were proceeding. It was occasionally questionable as to which category to put a tally mark. One example would be a student who continues to color a picture after the

teacher has asked the class to begin another task. The question becomes whether the student is being insubordinate for not following directions or whether the student is off-task because he has not begun the new task. A recommendation would be that for teacher/researcher's purposes, the behaviors be described as specifically as possible before the intervention begins.

This intervention showed that when students have clear and consistent rules and consequences, are positively reinforced, and given ample opportunity to solve their own problems through various means some misbehaviors will decrease. This will most likely result in a more positive classroom environment conducive to learning.

School C

Based on the information gathered and data analyzed on frequencies of misbehaviors, the students in the preschool showed constant improvements in the areas of insubordination and physical aggression. The areas of verbal aggression and off-task behavior were drifting up and down the scale during the same months and assignment completion was not grade appropriate for documentation. All areas were addressed in the classroom setting and then reviewed at the end of the intervention. The increase of misbehaviors during the intervention was not due to the ineffectiveness of the interventions themselves, but to the fact that the students could not remember new behavioral patterns or rules and consequences when they returned from a short break. The process had to be started again or reviewed.

The teacher/researcher concluded that it is necessary to start behavior interventions at the beginning of the year and continuously repeat them for the new students who are entering throughout the year. The staff involved in the classroom must remain consistent about the rules established and the consequences that follow. It is the only way for a daily routine to function with some type of normalcy and for all to have a feeling of respect and safety.

The children loved to have positive reinforcement when they were "caught being good." It was a simple hug, high five, sticker or stamp that would bring a smile to their faces. This attitude then went home and the children were proud to show off stamps and stickers to parents or guardians. This increased the students' self-esteem and offered the others a chance to see good behavior in action. Those students who were special attention seekers also received attention for the positive things they accomplished. For the negative attention, one of a variety of options was chosen, such as redirection of student behavior, time outs, or parent contact.

It was very important for the teacher/researcher to be a good model of the correct behaviors. This was by far the most successful choice as far as the interventions went. Role playing was a difficult idea for the young children to comprehend although the use of puppetry was another good tool. Students were given the opportunity to discuss to the best of their ability their feelings about the misbehaviors and how they wanted to be treated by the other students. Cooperative learning groups in their traditional form did not work for the youngest age level of the children; however, small groups were taught to take turns and using good words when playing games with the teacher or other classroom assistants. Again some of the children have developmental disabilities that hinder them from participating in these groups. They were instructed in a one-on-one setting as much as possible.

At the beginning of the intervention, in August/September, rapport needed to be built between the students and their teacher. The decrease seen in insubordination in the following months is attributed to the fact that constant repetition of verbal and visual cues were used to set the tone for the classroom. Expectations that the students follow the rules and understand the consequences contributed to the students' respect for one another and for their teacher. Role playing did not have as much of an affect as modeling good behavior did for the preschool students. The students were able to

understand a disrespectful act or a rude attitude when the teacher modeled the said behavior for them. They responded by using proper verbal techniques taught to them. Once the classroom routine was established, the teacher/researcher was able to have a better managed classroom.

The teacher/researcher attributes the rise and fall of incidents of off-task behavior to a variety of reasons; first, there are times when the children are gone from school for a length of time and they seem to forget the rules of school. Second, they are getting used to a routine that may change; for example if the class were to go outside to play or go on an outing, this disrupts the daily schedule. Third, some of the children exhibit some characteristics of attention deficit disorder where they are constantly on the move and cannot focus or concentrate on a given activity. Other children have some behavior problems that at times interfere with the learning process which is a characteristic of these children. The teacher/researcher attributes the low numbers of incidents of verbal aggression in October and November to very successful problem-solving sessions dealing with stuent-to-student respect. It was not concluded why the number increased again in December.

During the course of the intervention, at least 1/4th of the time was spent catering to the special needs of a few students who are attention or behavior disordered and assisting the new students in learning the daily routine. The decreases seen in Table 6 though clearly show that interventions were working in the areas of insubordination and physical aggression. The children felt safe and comfortable enough to stand up for themselves and use good language and actions to solve problems. Those areas where the scores varied were also very busy months for the students and by the time the class was filled to its maximum of 15 students, it took time for all to settle in and feel comfortable with the different personalities. The rest of the classroom time was spent with relatively few problems during the course of the intervention.

The teacher/researcher from school C felt that the daily tally sheet was difficult to manage when each class period only lasted two and one half hours. Other notes and paperwork got more priority over the tally sheet. The tally sheet did an excellent job in showing, however, where the interventions actually worked; but it was not accurate in reporting the fact that most of the misbehaviors came from only a few students. The teacher/researcher also found it difficult to continually restart the interventions due to the many new children entering the program. The students already present and who had already gone through it would get bored easily and then begin to act out.

In a normal preschool setting when the year starts out with a full classroom, it would be recommended that the interventions be put to work and continue to be clear and concise. Then the classroom would most likely run very smoothly. However, in a situation such as an at-risk preschool, the opportunity must be taken when it arises to correct the misbehaviors, and there must be flexibility when teaching specific interventions. The students are not used to retaining information and therefore it must be continuously repeated. The children were found to be learning and using the rules when they played but they still relied on the authority figure to help them through the rough spots. Positive reinforcement is also a key factor in establishing a positive learning environment. The children look up to someone who is positive and they strive to please that person which in turn pleases themselves.

The positive discipline intervention was effective at all three sites. At the 5th-grade level, the students were mature enough to take responsibility for their own behavior in many areas. In fifth grade, the incidents of insubordination were low compared with both the 1st-grade and pre-k classrooms. Many 1st-grade and pre-k students were not able to rationalize the consequences of insubordination. It can also be concluded that the intervention had a greater effect on the areas of physical and verbal aggression in the 5th-grade class than in the 1st-grade or pre-k class. The cooperative group

activities were more difficult in the two lower grade levels, largely due to the abstract nature of the tasks. The fact that most of the cooperative group activities were verbal assignments made these tasks more complex for the 1st-grade and pre-k students. Off-task behavior was still a concern at all three sites, and future interventions will have to address this more stringently or with different strategies. At the 1st-grade level, the incidents of students with no assignment were few compared to those at the 5th-grade level. This may also relate to the maturity of the students. First-grade students are eager to please. They will do their work to please both teacher and parents.

Overall, the positive discipline interventions will most likely be effective to a degree at any grade level. The teacher/researcher must keep in mind that the maturity of their students should guide the interventions chosen.

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APPENDICES

**Appendix A**
**Teacher Survey**
**School A**



August 1996

Dear Teacher,

My name is Bryan Gerk, and I am a student in the Field Based Master of Arts Program through Saint Xavier University. As part of my graduate work, I am implementing a project in my classroom to improve discipline and create a positive classroom environment. I am asking you to fill out the attached survey about your classroom discipline.

Responses will be held in confidence and will be used only for the express purpose of the research for the masters' program. Participation in the survey is voluntary. Your assistance would be greatly appreciated.

Thank You

Bryan Gerk

Discipline and Inclusion Survey for Teachers

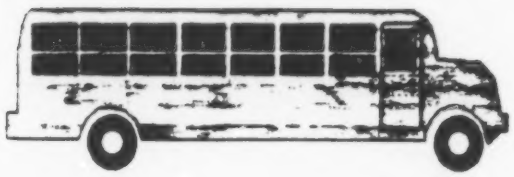
Dear Teacher,

My name is Amy McBride and I am a student in the Field Based Master of Arts Program through St. Xavier University. As part of my graduate work, I am implementing a project in my classroom to improve discipline and create a positive classroom environment. Included as part of my work, I will be asking teachers to fill out the attached surveys on discipline and their feelings on classroom inclusion.

Responses will be held in confidence and will be used only for the express purpose of the research for the master's program. Participation in the survey is voluntary. Your assistance will be greatly appreciated.

Thank You,
Amy McBride

Appendix C
Teacher Survey
School C



## *Discipline and Inclusion Survey for Teachers*

Dear Teachers,

My name is Roberta Obiala and I am a student in the Field Based Master of Arts Program through Saint Xavier University. As part of my graduate work, I am implementing a project in my classroom to improve discipline and create a positive classroom environment. Included as part of my work, I am asking teachers to fill out the attached surveys, on discipline and their feelings on classroom inclusion.

Responses will be held in confidence and will be used only for the express purpose of the research for the masters' program. Participation in the survey is voluntary. Your assistance would be greatly appreciated.

Thank You

Miss Obiala

## Appendix D
## Discipline Survey for Teachers

DISCIPLINE SURVEY FOR TEACHERS



1. How satisfied are you with your current teaching environment ?

| Extremely Unsatisfied | Satisfied | Extremely Satisfied |
|---|---|---|

2. How much of a concern is inappropriate behavior in your classroom ?

| Not At All | Somewhat | Very Much |
|---|---|---|

3. How much have parents been involved in supporting classroom discipline procedures ?

| Not At | Somewhat | Very Much |
|---|---|---|

4. What do you feel are some causes of student misbehaviors ?

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Classroom Inclusion Survey

1. Do you see inappropriate behavior as a concern among special education students?

YES _____ NO _____

2. To what extent do you see inclusion as a factor in students' inappropriate classroom behavior?

| NOT AT ALL | SOMEWHAT | VERY MUCH |
|---|---|---|

3. What do you see as some of the possible causes of this ?

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**Appendix F**
**Fifth Grade Classroom Rules**



August 26, 1996

Dear Parents,

I would like to welcome you and your child to my fifth-grade classroom. I hope you have had a relaxing and enjoyable summer. In order to reinforce classroom rules, I have supplied each student with a copy of these rules. These four rules are identical to the rules posted in my classroom. I would like you to review these rules with your child and sign and return the slip at the bottom of the paper. I look forward to working with you this school year.

Room 23 Classroom Rules:

1. **Respect Others. (students, teachers, custodians)**
2. **Keep Hands and Feet to Yourself.**
3. **Come Prepared for Class. (Have appropriate supplies and/or assignments)**
4. **Raise Hand Before Speaking.**

Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Mr. Bryan Gerk

---

I have read and reviewed Mr. Gerk's fifth-grade classroom rules with my child.

Parent Signature _____

Questions or Comments:_____

_____

_____

_____

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**ARCADIA BEST CONDUCT PROGRAM**
**(ABC Program)**

The rules of ABC are listed below:

1. Be respectful of self, others, and school property.
2. Keep hands, feet, and objects to yourself at all times.
3. Turn in your best class and home work on time.
4. Follow directions the first time given.
5. Walk quietly in school.
6. Walk to and from the buses.

I understand and support the rules of Arcadia's Best Conduct Program.

I understand and support the rewards and consequences of Arcadia's Best Conduct Program.

1. An enrichment period will be scheduled daily for first grade and weekly for second grade as a reward for those students who have chosen to follow school rules and complete all work on time. A green award certificate will be sent home to notify parents that their child has been following the rules.
2. If a student chooses to misbehave despite teacher warnings, a white slip will be sent home, signed by the parent, and returned to school. A child who has received a white ticket will not be participating in the next week's enrichment period. (Please note that warnings will not be given for serious misbehavior which could present harm to self or others. Warnings will also not be given for severe disrespect toward authority figures such as swearing at a teacher. In such instances, the principal will be notified immediately, the parent will be notified and disciplinary action will be taken.)
3. I agree to discuss the rules, rewards and consequences with my child before signing and returning this contract.

I have received the rules of the ***Discipline Guidelines*** and realize my child is expected to obey these rules.

_____
Child's Name

_____
Parent's Signature Date

Please use the back side for any comments. Thank you.

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## Appendix H
## Prekindergarten Classroom Rules

Illinois Primary Center
Room 10
Miss Obiala 's Classroom Rules

Dear Parents,

Here is a list of the very basic classroom rules that we try to follow here at school. It is very important for us to follow these rules so that our routine runs as smoothly as possible. It would also be very helpful for you to encourage your child to follow our school rules as well. Consistency from both home and school will allow the children the opportunity to fully understand and cooperate with these rules.

- Eyes should be on the adult (Teacher, Aide, Volunteer, or Foster Grandparent)
- Keep your legs and feet folded like a pretzel so that no one will trip over you and you will not kick anyone.
- Hands should be in your lap or on your knees to prevent them from being stepped on and they will not be touching, poking, pinching, or hitting any body else.
- Mouthes need to be closed so that you can hear all the directions or questions given by the teacher or adult in the group.

Thank you for your time and cooperation.

---

I have read and received the Classroom Rules from Miss Obiala and will help my child to do their best to participate properly in class.

CHILD'S NAME _____
PARENT'S SIGNATURE _____

Please return to school as soon as possible.

## Using the Color-Coded Card System for Tracking Behavior

This system is an easy way to monitor the behavior signals in your classroom—and it's simple to make. You will need a large sheet of poster board, a library pocket for each student and the reproducible "signals" on page 49

**Preparation:**

1. Paste the library pockets onto the poster board (see illustration), writing the name of a student on the front of each library pocket.

2. Reproduce enough behavior "signal" sets so that each student can have a school zone signal, a green light signal, a yellow light signal and a red light signal.

3. Have each student cut out and color his or her signals and place them in the library pocket in this order (front to back)—school zone, green light, yellow light and red light. Make sure that each student's name is on the back of each of his or her cards.

**Directions for Use:**

At the beginning of the school day, each student's pocket is arranged in order so that the school zone card is in front. This signifies that every student has started the day with a clean slate! If a student breaks a classroom rule and receives a warning, he or she removes the school zone card from the front of the pocket and places it behind all the other cards.

After the first consequence, the green card is showing.

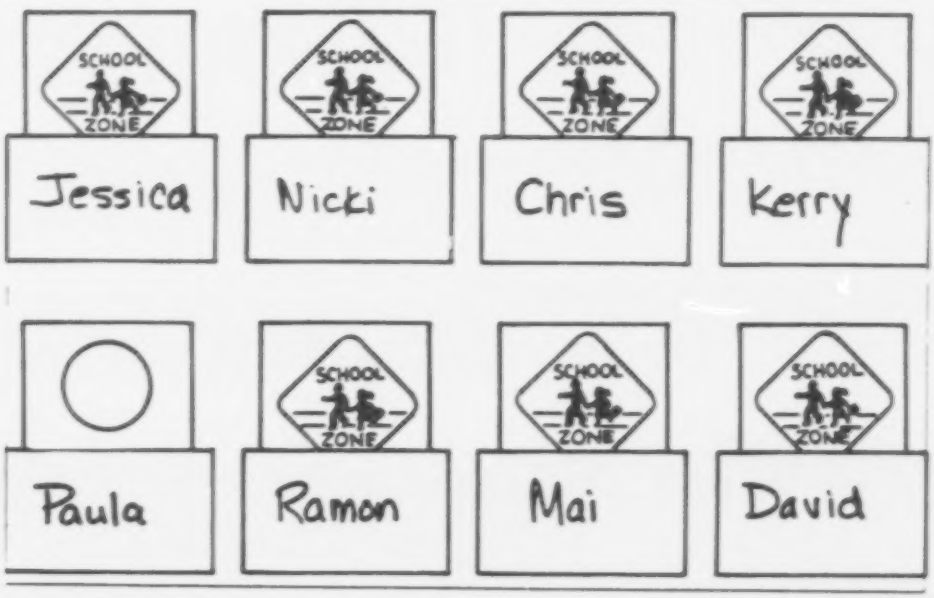
For example:

> "Monica, the rule in our classroom is no running. That's a warning."
>
> *Monica quietly gets up, removes the school zone card from the front of her pocket, and places it behind all the other cards.*

If a student receives a second consequence in a day, the green card is removed, placed behind the other cards, and the yellow signal is in the front of the pocket. If a student should receive a third consequence within a day, the red signal shows in the pocket.

The red indicates the student is at the fourth consequence. At this point the parents or principal should be involved.

At the end of the school day all cards are put back in order for the beginning of the next day. The number of consequences received by any individual student may be recorded on a separate documentation sheet.

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# Appendix J
## White Ticket from First Grade
## Behavior Tracking Chart

DATE

To the Parents of _____

Today your child had a problem with the following rule

_____ 1 Be respectful of self, others, and school property

_____ 2 Keep hands, feet, and objects to yourself at all times

_____ 3 Turn in your best class and home work on time

_____ 4 Follow directions the first time given

_____ 5 Walk quietly in school

_____ 6 Walk to and from the buses

Specific Misbehavior: _____

Your support in this area will be appreciated.

I am looking forward to seeing an improvement next week!

Sincerely,

Teacher

This notice will need to be signed and returned

_____

Parent/Guardian

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## Appendix K
## Sample Problem-Solving Lesson

Topic: Student to Student Respect

Objective: Students will learn how to deal with a situation proactively rather than reactively.

Two students role-played a situation in which one student accidently nudged the other while working. The second student reacted by immediately hitting the student that nudged him.

After this, the rest of the class broke up into cooperative groups whewre they brainstormed possible solutions. They were looking for different ways to handle this situation. Each group then shared their solutions and made note of the solution that was agreed upon by the class to be the best.

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# QUICK NOTE

## to Parents

To: _____

Just a quick note to tell you how pleased I am that _____

_____

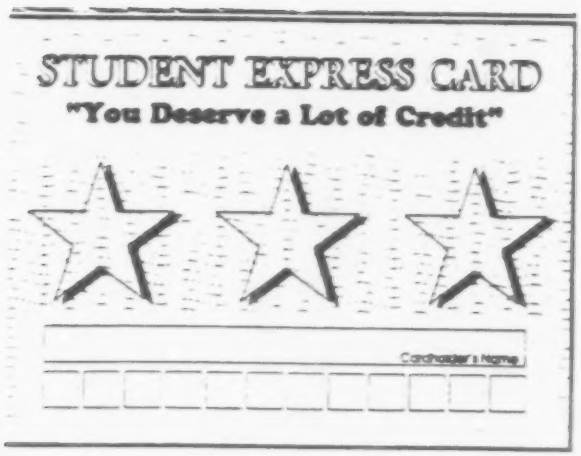
_____

_____

_____

_____

_____
Signed Date


STUDENT EXPRESS CARD
"You Deserve a Lot of Credit"
Cardholder's Name

**Any way you "slice it",**

_____**'s**

Student's name

**behavior is delightful!**

Thank you for

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Signed Date

---

To: _____

Student's name

**Your terrific behavior helps make our class special.**

Thank you for

_____

_____

_____

_____

Signed Date

TO: _____

**"You Earned It"**

FOR _____

_____

Date _____

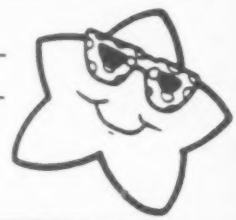
TO: _____

**"You Earned It"**

FOR: _____

_____

Date _____



TO: _____

**"You Earned It"**

FOR: _____

_____

Date _____

TO: _____

**"You Earned It"**

FOR: _____

_____

Date _____

TO: _____

**"You Earned It"**

FOR: _____

_____

Date _____

TO: _____

**"You Earned It"**

FOR: _____

_____

Date _____

TO: _____

**"You Earned It"**

FOR: _____

_____

Date _____

TO: _____

**"You Earned It"**

FOR: _____

_____

Date _____

© 1992 Lee Canter & Associates

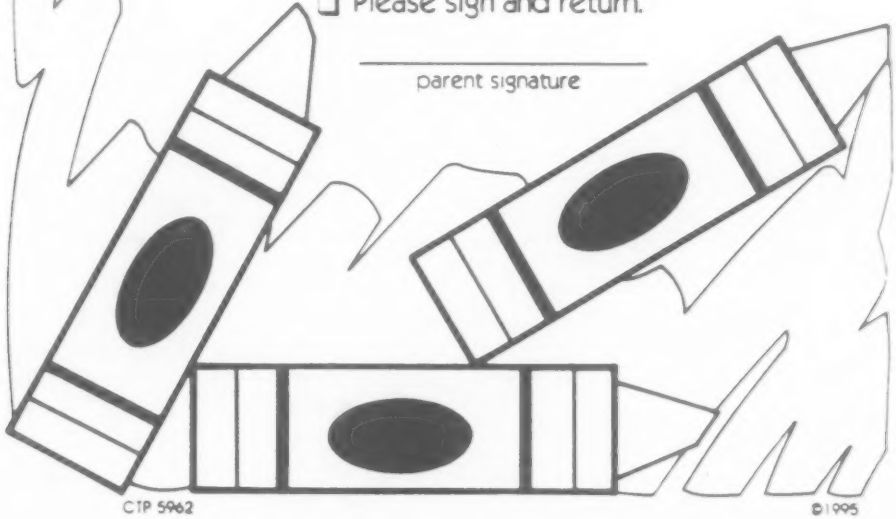
**Date:** _____

**From:** _____

**To:** _____

❑ Please keep for your records.
❑ Please sign and return.

_____
parent signature



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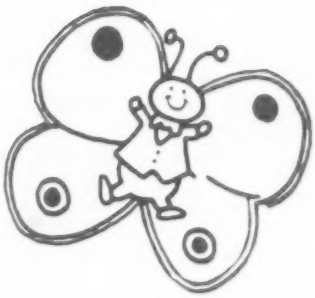
Appendix Q
Behavior Chart/Certificate
Prekindergarten

Child's Name

# I HAD A SUPER DAY!



Teacher's Name

Date

## WHAT We DID TODAY

Date

| | | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Number of Students | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | |
| Insubordination- | | | | | | | | |
| Disrespect towards teacher | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Physical Aggression- | | | | | | | | |
| Student to student | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Verbal Aggression- | | | | | | | | |
| Student to student | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Off-Task Behavior- | | | | | | | | |
| Student is actively | | | | | | | | |
| engaged in activity | | | | | | | | |
| other than what has | | | | | | | | |
| been assigned | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Inconsistent Assignment | | | | | | | | |
| Completion | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| Parent Communication | | | | | | | | |
| P - Phone Call | | | | | | | | |
| C - Conference | | | | | | | | |
| P. N. - Positive Note | | | | | | | | |
| N.N. - Negative Note | | | | | | | | |

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Appendix R
Teacher Checklist